Nurturing Tradition Fostering Change

Patriotism, Community Service and the Women's Auxiliary of American Legion Tony F. Soza-Ray Martínez Post 41

By Charles H. Sanderson
Edited by Dr. Pete R. Dimas

Photo on inside cover courtesy of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary

Contents

A note from the Author

The year 2009 was not a favorite for many in Phoenix. Banks crumbled and companies folded. Politicians yelled and activists yelled back. For me, these things all fade into the background, replaced by memories of my grandmother Edith's death. She was not just a grandmother to me. This fiesty woman, all spitfire and furrowed brow, was the most dominant woman of my life – the closest thing I had to a mother at all through a difficult childhood.

When Latino Perspectives Magazine asked me to document the story of Post 41's Auxiliary, it was more than a trip into South Phoenix history for me. With a different eye, I spent the last portion of the year listening to the words of Post 41's Auxiliary members. I watched their faces, catching glimpses of a lost grandmother. A look; a phrase; all the hidden nuances in a dozen women came together like a jigsaw puzzle memory. They would talk of Christmas, and I could smell my grandmother's tamales. When they talked of dances, I could see my grandmother doing the same.

As these women told stories of how they nurtured a struggling community, and fostered change in Phoenix, they unwittingly helped me to conjure up my grandmother one last time. For this and their stories, I'm forever thankful to Lorraine Vasquez, Louise Vildosola, Lupe Valenzuela, Mary Córdova, Eleanor Abeytia and Dolores Peña. Current Auxiliary president Josephine Herrera, and past president Patsy Lugo were of invaluable help, as were past Commander Robert Hernandez and so many more.

I would be remiss if I did not point out this book would be nearly impossible without the help of Dr. Pete R. Dimas, Christine Marín and Jean Reynolds. Their contributions to the story of Mexican Americans in Phoenix have helped to piece together this city's jigsaw puzzle of forgotten memories.

The history of South Phoenix continues to be told in the smiles and words of those who have lived it. We simply need to listen.

Nurturing Tradition, Fostering Change, by Charles H. Sanderson
Published by Latino Perspectives Media and by The Raul H. Castro Institute

Second edition 2010, Phoenix, Arizona Printed in the United States of America.

The beginning

The heat in phoenix is breaking finally. With September gone and October half done, the waning weeks of 2009 have a gentler light. Louise Vildosola sits elegantly in a chair of her living room, with the glow of a midday sun across her face. The light and shadow shows 91 gentle years mapped out on her skin like beautiful lacework. Her son wanders through the house, working on some project as she remembers a day 61 years gone. In her hands is an old photograph of several men; among them are her brothers, Nick and Moses.

She gazes off through the wall of her living room and back to that day in her brother Nick Perez's living room. She begins to describe the memory in a crisp voice that makes her age hard to believe, "They decided to have an Auxiliary, so being that my brother was very active with the Post, he organized a meeting to get the girls started. And they had the meeting at his house. So there's how I was involved. My husband wasn't a veteran, but my brothers were." She explains, matter-of-factly, "so I was... like a charter member, and there's very few living now. There *were* about 12 of us."

Several women were present that evening; among them were Anita Lewis, Pina Fuentes, Josephine Valenzuela, Rebecca Valenzuela, Dora Gomez, Ofelia Soza and her sister Amelia.

That's as far as Vildosola goes in her description of the Women's Auxiliary at the Tony F. Soza/Ray Martinez American Legion Post 41 in Phoenix. Louise doesn't give any details, and apologizes humbly for not having more stories to share about that time. The night she described was January 30, 1948. At 9:00 p.m., Rebecca Valenzuela called the meeting to order, and Post 41 member Efren Valenzuela began outlining the Women's Auxiliary's mission.[1]

The Auxiliary had begun, nationally, in 1919 alongside the new American Legion to unite the wives, sisters and mothers of veterans. The organization was born out of the need for women to come together and better deal with the challenges of raising a family while their husbands were off at war. The American Legion itself was chartered for the veterans of wars. The Auxiliary focused on helping these soldiers enter civil life again and find the resources they would need.

Since being chartered by Congress in 1920, the American Legion Auxiliary has grown to include veterans' granddaughters and great-granddaughters, becoming the largest patriotic women's service organization in the world with almost a million members. The Auxiliary has gone on to implement hundreds of programs to assist veterans, their families, and the community itself.

Locally, the American Legion Tony F. Soza/Ray Martinez Post 41 and the Post 41 Women's Auxiliary have worked together in an effort that goes beyond helping the community. These members took on the struggle for civil liberties that Mexican Americans in Phoenix were not previously afforded. Since the start of that fight, the Post has grown through the decades to gain political clout in Phoenix and become a trustworthy legend in the community.

Louise Vildosola hasn't been to a meeting in a while. She doesn't drive and her second husband has passed. She has to convince

Photo courtesy of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary

Anita Lewis Chavez, seated at center, with other members of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary in 1948

her family to take her, "I know they would if I ask, but..." Louise doesn't need to finish her sentence; she doesn't want to impose on her family. Still she occasionally finds a way to the Post for dinners honoring past commanders and Auxiliary presidents—she being one of them. She even got down to the Post this year to celebrate an old friend's birthday; Adam Diaz had turned 100 on September 2, 2009.

In numerous interviews, many members of the Post 41 Auxiliary will speak humbly of community events or the excitement of going to a state or national convention. Don't be fooled by this gentle, humble presentation in their voices. The women of Post 41 have made their mark in Phoenix history—and continue to do so.

One trait of the currently active members of Post 41 Women's Auxiliary is that they are just that: active. They won't talk much about the past, unless pressed. It pleases them more to describe the numerous events and causes they are involved with at the moment. They fairly glow in the telling of their various dances, shirt sales, holiday parties and menudo breakfast events to raise money for scholarships and meals for homeless veterans.

These efforts have long, deep roots in their community—one that has sat south of the railroad tracks, on the dusty edges of downtown Phoenix, for decades. Tight-knit barrios had to make their own way, with little or no city resources. Everyone knew everyone; everyone had a nickname; everybody had to pitch in, if they could. Life revolved around the churches, parks and front porches where people would gather and wash away the day's trials with prayer, dancing and a drink.

In the early 1900s, Mexican American women in Phoenix were frequently the primary breadwinners for many of these households, and often as single mothers. With few glamorous

opportunities, many took jobs as laundry or domestic workers—such as young Minnie Rangel Martínez who, at fourteen, was a maid for a beauty parlor in the mornings; she then labored in a hand-laundry all afternoon. Some women found jobs as stenographers, clerks or in retail sales. A few found success in owning restaurants or managing hotels. These were treasured opportunities, as most employment offered to the Mexican American community was in hard, menial jobs. Every morning, it was common for the men to make their way to a large "*marqueta*" in downtown Phoenix, where they hoped to be picked for a farm crew. Those that were chosen, rode the trucks to muddy fields and harvested cotton, melons and other crops as the desert sun wore them down. This was no reliable way to earn a paycheck. The women's income made it possible for many families to survive.[2]

And though women in poor neighborhoods were often primary providers, they had to deal with the expectations of society at that time; that wives were to stay home and watch the kids. Then, with the start of World War II, life was thrown into an uncontrollable shift. It was a time full of contradictions for everyone. Soldiers could become heroes yet return home, perceived as nobodies. Men like Ray Martínez, Adam Diaz and Father Albert Braun would challenge the societal status quo and receive all the accolades. Meanwhile, the women of the barrios kept life moving forward and provided the support system that allowed these changes, without recognition for their important and perhaps subtler contributions.

The roots of activism

Whenever an issue arose for the barrio, someone was there to tackle the problem. Taking action was the only way they could protect their community. This determination grew to be a strong trait in the children that would eventually follow their parents' path on the frontline of civil rights. Before young Minnie was working her two jobs at 14, she watched her parents, Luis and Josefina Rangel, as they actively helped to improve life in the barrio. One example of the community's willingness to work together is the construction of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church.

A well-known former city councilman, Adam Diaz, has shared in numerous interviews his experience of worshiping in the St. Mary's Church basement. In the local Hispanic lore of Phoenix it is often mentioned how the priest at St. Mary's Church, Reverend Novatus Benzing, made an unwelcome announcement, as construction was finishing on the church's beautiful superstructure in 1915. He limited the Mexican worshipers to hold all their functions in the basement beneath white parishioners who could worship in the main church. It did not matter that the church had been built by Mexican Americans, or that some of their more prominent citizens had even provided the land and some of the funds for its construction.

In October of 1925, the Spanish Father Ántimo G. Nebreda arrived from Los Angeles to conduct mass in that basement, and to find a way to ease the growing tension in the community. He found a Mexican American congregation that was disillusioned with its

city and in need of a welcoming church. He had been called to Phoenix to quiet ten years of growing anger and frustration. He gave them what they wanted by helping them build a church of their own.[3]

Minnie Martínez remembers her parents helped raise funds to build this new church, "My dad, he worked for the Donofrio family... and they had a building that had a dance hall on the second floor. They used to tell him to go ahead and use it and give a dance to raise funds, and that's how they raised the funds. My mother and father were on the committee to raise funds for the bells of the church... they had dances, and they'd sell food and cakes and all kinds of stuff."[4]

In December of 1928, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church was finished and dedicated, and the community again had a church of their own.

Securing church bells was not the only effort for Minnie's dad, though. Minnie watched her father's continued involvement in the community as a member of La Sociedad Alianza Hispano-Americana—an organization founded in Tucson in 1894. He would go to meetings at the Alianza's Alma Azteca Lodge #9 in Phoenix at 333 E. Washington Street. There, its members worked to defend the civil rights of Mexican Americans, stop injustice and segregation, and organize social events in hopes of countering the growing animosity they felt from Anglos. The group promoted civic duty, acculturation and provided sickness/death benefits and burial insurance for its members.

First Holy communion in the basement of St. Mary's Church, circa 1905

Photo courtesy of Frank Barrios

La Alianza also pitched in financially with the Phoenix Americanization Committee to establish Friendly House in 1920 as a way to provide education to immigrant communities. Their hope was to help Mexicans and Mexican Americans find success and fit into American society as equals. Friendly House also helped Minnie Martinez and innumerable youths find their first job opportunities. Friendly House's second director, Plácida García Smith, would go on to become one of the most respected women in Phoenix. This and other organizations of the time would become the bedrock of social activism in the Mexican American community of Phoenix—and in some cases the direct progenitors of more modern institutions in the fight for equal rights.[5]

In the barrios, the groundwork of ethics and success through determination was often laid down by the parents, as in Minnie Martinez's case. The Post 41 Auxiliary's first president, Anita Lewis Chávez is another example of a family's influence. She was the daughter of John Lewis—an early Notary public who had come to Phoenix and worked as a realtor and paralegal for mostly Hispanic clients. He would often give valued legal advice, though he was no attorney. His only daughter Anita was bright and interested enough to help him with his work. He decided to take her under his wing and nurture her interest in law.

Anita's mother, Enriqueta C. Lewis, worked in the community with women like Plácida García Smith, at the Friendly House. They and other Mexican American women in the community formed the Arizona Voter's League in 1940 and held meetings for Spanish-speaking residents, answering questions relating to civic matters and U.S. law.

Anita had already begun following in her parents' footsteps as an active member of the community by her 14th birthday, when she was named president of Las Mexicanitas Jr. Club, a social club for young women.[6]

Expanding on her father's unofficial legal career, Anita Lewis Chávez would study law at the University of Arizona as the sole woman in her class. Later she would realize she also had the honor of going to the University with Raul H. Castro, who would eventually become Arizona's first Mexican American governor. Anita passed the State Bar exam in January of 1947 and began practice as an attorney. Records show she most likely was the second ever Hispanic female attorney in United States history, after Mary Estela Cota-Robles who had graduated law school in 1939 and practiced in Tucson.

Chávez began practicing in Phoenix in 1947, just months before being elected the first president of the newly-formed American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary—where she could tackle community causes and follow her mother's steps.

Chávez found no firms willing to hire a woman. She struck out on her own, running her practice largely out of her own home, though she rented a downtown office space for a short while. Her focus was family law, but she handled cases of all kinds. Often, she worked on barter—representing people in exchange for a little yard work or housework. Sometimes she gave women a place to stay for the night as they dealt with a domestic abuse case or other uncomfortable situations. Chávez was often approached by Thunderbird

Post 41, asking her advice, as they came headlong into difficult characters during the early days of their fight for civil rights. Eventually she became a City of Phoenix Judge Pro Tempore, where she was known to berate domestic abuse defendants in both Spanish and English.[7]

Though Anita would suddenly pass on in 1985, and her mother at 101 in 2001, the thread continues: Anita Lewis Chavez's daughter, Harriet Chávez, would get the law bug working in their home office and eventually took her first job as the city of Mesa's first woman and Hispanic prosecutor. In 2003 she was appointed a Maricopa Superior Court Judge.

Minnie Rangel Martinez and Anita Lewis Chávez are only two women of many at Post 41. Numerous stories show the pride with which Mexican American women in Phoenix carried on the work to better their community.

The changing times

LIFE IN PHOENIX COULD be trying for Mexican Americans in the first half of the 20th century. Being a woman only added to the challenge. From an early age, Mexican American women, like other minorities, experienced the hardships of a society that looked down on them, or took advantage of them. Ray Martínez, a founder of Post 41, remembers one story of his wife Minnie's hardships while employed through the Friendly House, where she faced sexual advances as a child, and was refused payment for her work:

"My wife—just out of grammar school—went to the Friendly House, you know to hire out... She was sent to a lawyer and his wife. They were just moving into an apartment. Well, they told her it'd be about a week's work. And she'd be paid 10 dollars."

"Well, seven days she worked. And I mean 8–10 hours a day. And, then of course, in those days too, they hired young Hispanic girls... why? An effort was made, you know—sexual harassment. And they had to suffer those indignities too, you know—when the wife wasn't home."

The man had called to Minnie while she was cleaning one of the rooms. He was in the bedroom. When she approached, he opened the bedroom door to show himself... without clothes on. Minnie spun about and left the house.

She returned the next day to ask for her money. Ray continues, "...when she was through, [Minnie] asked the lady, 'I'm through. You don't need me so...' And the wife called out to the husband, said, 'Honey, give me the ten dollars so I can pay.'"

The husband replied, "I already paid her."[8]

Minnie returned to the apartment with her father, to no response. Friendly House's Plácida García Smith even attempted speaking to the couple; still no response. Plácida finally had to tell Minnie that there was nothing she could do. If they tried calling the police, it was likely only the lawyer would be believed.[9]

But that was in the early 1930s. Their world was changing. The long-standing gender and racial boundaries were slowly beginning to break apart. Even the cultural traditions within the Hispanic community were being challenged. Mexican American women were finding a growing confidence

in asserting their rights as the years wore on, and new voices taught them what their parents may not have.

One of these voices was Spanish-language journalist María A. García. In 1940, she founded Phoenix's first LULAC group, Council 110. Women of the barrios were already inspired by her stories in the newspaper *El Mensajero* and were likely spurred into activism by the South Phoenix socio-economic and political injustices that García wrote about. LULAC Council 110's first meeting was held at the Friendly House, and its first president would be the woman who had helped Minnie and others find work in their youth; Plácida García Smith.

Plácida was another woman in Phoenix that helped to elevate women's belief that they could do more for themselves. As director of Friendly House, she helped better the lives of numerous residents of South Phoenix, and fought for improvements in the community. She was a member of the Southside Improvement Organization, a group that was responsible for the construction of Grant Park and Harmon Park; two focal points of community life in the Mexican American barrios of South Phoenix. Even the young attorney Anita Lewis looked on, inspired by her mother Enriqueta's interaction with these women.

Just as Mexican American women in Phoenix had been reading María A. García's stories of the community's struggle in *El Mensajero*, they also tuned their radios in to KIFN and listened to Phoenix's first female radio show host Graciela Gil Olivarez. She had started as a stenographer like so many other Mexican American women in Phoenix. But her ease with the Mexican American community and her command of both English and Spanish was opening up a door into radio broadcasting.

In the early 1950s, as Women's Program Director at KIFN, Graciela would call attention to the injustices her listeners were facing, much as Spanish newspapers had mobilized the community to help in the World War II efforts a decade earlier. It was still a changing time, with Graciela frustrating the radio station's owners constantly. They felt she should have limited her programming to culinary arts, jazz and 'women's interests.'

But women's interests were reaching broader than cooking shows and music. They were achieving milestones in their charge toward full social equality beyond the 1912 suffrage referendum that gave Arizona women the right to vote.

The shift toward a better social environment for Mexican Americans can be seen in the juxtaposition of two stories. Whereas Minnie Martínez's husband Ray once shared the memory of Mexican Americans being beaten up on an elevator by police simply because they could, Minnie Martínez has an elevator story of her own from the days she returned to work after her kids were grown. She chuckles as she recalls her job as an elevator operator at Phoenix City Hall, "working on the elevator... This old man; one day, we were alone... He pinched my butt. I opened the door, the next floor. I said 'Get out!'

Laughing again, Minnie concludes, "And when he got out, I hit him so hard, I knocked his glasses off. And two policemen were going by, and one says 'What's going on here?' And I told 'em. And they got him to the police station."[10]

The world was not simply changing in public. Parents found it challenging as always to keep their children in check when they began to mature. Now they sought a youthful independence from tradition. The secret marriage of Minnie Rangel to Ray Martínez in 1938 is one example of how the women of the World War II generation, were changing:

"My sister, who was not quite two years younger than I, she got married first and she was sixteen... so they got real possessive of me and they didn't want me to go anywhere or go out anywhere, just work and come home. I was going out with Ray—we were dating—so naturally they took a dislike to him, because they didn't want me to get married, I guess. So we ended up eloping because they wouldn't even let him come to visit... Of course I sneaked out of my bedroom, and went over to his house. His family was very nice to me... they approved of me. I bought a suit, it was charcoal, and had a pink blouse and a little pillbox hat, and I had my gloves... I snuck the gloves in my purse, so my mother wouldn't say, "where are you going with those gloves?' And then we had our witnesses—a girlfriend of mine and a very close friend of Ray's ... after we got married, a few days later I went to get my clothes and I had bought a bedroom set and several things. They wouldn't give them to me. They said, 'No, everything stays here, just your clothes.'"[11]

Minnie, like many of her generation, was striking out on her own. They would transform the United States into something new. But first, there was a war to deal with; a war that would spark even more change in the social structure of the United States. Less than five years into her marriage, young Minnie looked on as her husband enlisted in the Navy and shipped off to serve aboard the U.S.S. Makassar Strait. The Japanese had attacked U.S. soil.

On the home front

AFTER THE U.S.S. ARIZONA and 17 other ships were sunk or beached in the attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States mobilized its military almost overnight. World War II had begun for America. In Phoenix as in other cities, families, organizations—entire barrios—joined in the war effort, urged on by local church leaders and Spanish news publications. Men signed up to fight in droves, such as the Abeytia family that saw four brothers enlist; two in the Marines and two in the Army. America's male work force was all but vanishing and women were needed to take their place. During World War II, the number of women in the workforce increased by 50%. Mexican American women were also finding unprecedented job opportunities. When companies got military contracts, like the Goodyear Aircraft Corporation west of Phoenix, women were employed to build airplane parts. Women were also seizing an opportunity to take control of their lives and step out of the bindings of a patriarchal culture.

In the early days of the war, Phoenix began to feel its labor shortage, and cotton—as one of its primary economies—was at risk. Local Mexican American organizations pulled together and helped to organize a work force to pick the crops. La Sociedad

Mutualista Porfirio Diaz, Los Leñadores del Mundo (Woodsmen of the World) and others formed Victory Labor Volunteer groups to harvest the cotton crop before it was lost. Volunteers registered to pitch in, and soon Anglos and Mexican Americans worked side by side in the fields to finish the job with patriotism flush in their faces.[12]

Through these efforts, an estimated 35,000 pounds of long-staple cotton was harvested by over 5,000 Mexican American workers; men, women and children all pitched in.[13]

On other occasions, money-raising events were organized with mariachis, folklórico dancers, plenty of food and celebration. Bond drives raised as much as $90,000 in a single night. Even children took to the streets, collecting rubber, cigarettes and money for war bonds. In July of 1942, Standard Oil was the sponsor of a local contest to collect rubber for use in the war. Rogelio "Roy" Yañez led several children from his Marcos de Niza community in their effort—collecting 2,200 pounds of old rubber. They won the contest, and Yañez gave the children a party complete with music, cake, ice cream and sweets.[14]

Meanwhile, the children also watched World War II unfolding and forever changing the course of history—and their lives. Lorraine Vásquez, a member and former president of the Post 41 Women's Auxiliary, recalls living next to the railroad tracks, "My father worked for the railroad. And so we lived on the railroad quarters next to the railroad—across the street from the railroad tracks. We used to have these trains go by with the Red Cross. And you'd see these patients. They were laying … one on top of the other."

"Sometimes they would stop… I would see nurses. Probably that's where I wanted to become a nurse. These nurses would get down and walk, and they had white uniforms on… with this blue, beautiful cape and red lining."

Still, the faces kept rolling past for young Lorraine to see, "Some patients would come down, if they could. Most of them couldn't. … and so they would give us letters to mail for them. Then they would tip us; pennies, nickels, dimes…"

"Then also, we'd see these troop trains come by, these guys. They would also hand us mail. … We'd go up with a little box and they'd put their mail in there and tips."

"We also had a time, one time, where it was prisoners. German prisoners we saw. We weren't allowed close there." [15]

Throughout the war, young Lorraine watched as its various cast-members passed through the train station. Meanwhile, stories of the soldiers' efforts came to them in local newspapers. In 1943, *El Sol* displayed a two-page advertisement to honor all local Mexican American servicemen, alongside a list of their names.[16] The local community's participation was also trumpeted in the pages of *El Mensajero* and other media.

The community passed its time with radio, newspapers, and world maps, following the path of loved ones across Europe and the Pacific Ocean. Then in April of 1945, Germany finally came under Allied control, and the U.S. Government was preparing in secret to take the unprecedented step of breaking Japan into submission with an atomic bomb. The soldiers would be coming home soon. Families rejoiced when they heard the news.

The returning troops

After the war ended, it was not uncommon for women in the Hispanic barrios of Phoenix to stop working as they married returning G.I.s or as their husbands were discharged from military service. Minnie Rangel Martínez recalled in a 1998 interview how her husband, Ray, had returned from World War II and began taking college classes with money from the G.I. Bill. But it didn't last. There was no way to squeeze college in with raising a family and a low-paying job. He dropped out and found work as a city bus driver—earning more than he had before the war. His family was a priority.

Their family was growing. Minnie was now pregnant with Gilbert. Ray asked her to quit her job and watch over the family. Minnie explains her circumstances, "I didn't want to quit. I liked my job and the friends I had there. Then one day my husband hid all my shoes and I couldn't go to work, so I quit."[17]

But the attempt to return to a pre-war idea of normalcy was like trying to repackage an opened present. Many women did return to the home and essentially gave men back their jobs—but many others did not. In her 1998 Masters' thesis *We Made our Life As Best We Could With What We Had*, historian Jean Reynolds conducted an invaluable survey of Phoenix area business directories. She found that in 1949, Mexican American women seemed to maintain their jobs in white-collar industries. In other industries, men reclaimed the job opportunities they'd left behind. Yet, even those women that had put down the rivet guns began to question the traditional order of their lives.

It seemed everyone was questioning the pecking order. Those downtrodden by the prevalent pre-war social structure were coming home from war with a rejuvenated spirit. But in returning to routine life in the United States they found they had lost the equality they felt during the war—whether they had fought in it or picked crops shoulder to shoulder with Anglos in an effort to keep the economy thriving. Organizations were forming across the U.S. to fight for equality across all genders and racial lines. In 1946, the American Legion Thunderbird Post 41 of Phoenix joined those ranks.

As soldiers returned home to the barrios of Phoenix, they needed support just as any other soldier. They approached the existing American Legion Post and found they were not welcome. The answer to this problem was simple; they started their own Post where Mexican American soldiers would be welcome.

But they did not simply want camaraderie. Their goal was to make a change. The small group of 16 members began having informal meetings every Tuesday at Frank Fuentes' family restaurant, "La Poblanita" on Second Street and Jefferson. They discussed the poverty in their neighborhoods, and the discrimination their families were enduring. Their ideas and concerns were jotted on a napkin. They were new to the idea of an American Legion Post, but it was clear what their agenda would be. "We talked about how to organize because there was a lot of discrimination against Mexicans and we thought it was time to start fighting back... Discrimination, [was] the number one issue. We wanted a piece of the pie, too," explained founding member Ray Martínez.

They found early success by uniting

with the LULAC Council 110 that María A. García had formed. They forced desegregation of a Tempe swimming pool. Post 41 then won a battle for Mexican American veterans' housing. Two years after the American Legion had granted a charter to Post 41, their membership was growing alongside their success. It was time for the Post to find a permanent home. They were now squeezing three hundred men into the restaurant's small dining room for each meeting.

In the search for a new home, the members finally decided on a piece of city-owned land at Second Avenue and Grant Street, south of Van Buren. It was across from Grant Park, originally built with the pre-war community's assistance and now a popular Hispanic hangout. The men successfully lobbied for permission to put their building there, working with the city to iron out a 50-year lease at one dollar per year, without property tax. Fellow veteran and future Arizona senator, Barry Goldwater was on hand to help secure the deal and cut through the city's red tape.

The ground broke July 26, 1947, and the building began to take shape. The volunteer workers were rewarded at the end of a hot dusty day of construction with a beer keg, but otherwise were paid nothing for their work. This was a labor of love for their community. The Post hired professionals only when necessary if a task required skills or tools that the volunteers didn't possess or could not get. Steadily, the new building rose up.

Minnie recalls providing meals for the men building Post 41, at first by herself. "I was in charge of feeding all the men that worked. It was a hard job! Nobody helped me! Hah! And I didn't volunteer. I was assigned!!"[18]

Certainly she couldn't do all this work on her own. More and more, the women began to help, seeing to things the men were just too distracted to handle. It was time to make the women's effort more official.

Starting the Auxiliary

On DEC. 19, 1947, the American Legion Post 41 held a meeting at Post member Nick Perez's house. Members were surrounded by their mothers, sisters, and wives. Two guests of honor were present; Laura Ortiz was there as Department Vice President, along with Anne Stedwell, Department Secretary and Commander of the Hazel Morton Post 43 of Phoenix. Post Commander Ray Martínez and Chaplain Frank Fuentes proposed the formation of a Women's Auxiliary to Post 41. The vote was unanimous, and the Auxiliary applied for its charter on January 15, 1948.

Their first true meeting would be held Friday night, January 30, 1948. Applications were handed out, officers elected, and annual dues collected at $3.00. That night, the women began what is now over 60 years of community involvement.

As Ofelia R. Soza remembered in a 1992 letter, "the women were a bit apprehensive, but at the same time excited about being included in this wonderful experience."

The Auxiliary's first meetings were held under the stars at Post 41's new building, still being constructed. Ofelia continues in her letter to describe, "They planned the drapes for the windows and the decorating of the

'Powder Room.' All sewing was done by the Auxiliary members. They would meet many evenings at the home of Josephine Valenzuela…or other members would volunteer their homes. Well equipped with sewing materials, and in some cases with portable sewing machines, they would sew to their hearts content. One could feel the excitement in the air, as they prepared for this wonderful adventure!"

The Auxiliary charter document was presented to them on April 1, 1948 by Mrs. Fay Dorsett of Mesa, District Commander of the Arizona American Legion Auxiliary. The women began their work immediately, with Laura Ortiz and Anne Stedwell addressing the women on Child Welfare month and several other activities.

In an odd twist and proof of how fast times were changing, the women organized with help from members of the Auxiliary of "Luke-Greenway" Post 1.

This was the same Post that two years earlier had made Mexican American veterans feel unwelcome.

It would not take long for the Post 41 Auxiliary became self-sufficient.

The attorney Anita Lewis Chávez was just 23 years old when she was elected president in that first meeting. Josephine "Pina" Fuentes was named vice-president; Josephine Valenzuela became secretary; Rebecca Valenzuela the treasurer; Mary Louise Rubio was sergeant-at-arms; Mary Perez the color bearer; and Commander Ray Martínez's wife, Minnie, served as chaplain.

Quickly, the legionnaires returned to construction of their Post. The women set about planning how it would be decorated and providing food for the workers. The men were building their Post, but it was the women who would make it feel like home.

Tony Valenzuela, who would later become a member of Post 41, remembers how Frank "Pipa" Fuentes and the Auxiliary members made construction of their building so much more bearable. "We'd all work to maybe 2 o'clock, and then the Auxiliary would feed us. They would do the cooking. And then Frank Fuentes would open up a great big tub of cold beer and we'd have a ball. You know, that was great! Especially on weekends. The Auxiliary [has] always been good and we never give them credit."[19]

By March of 1948, the building was done. Everyone was there. Minnie Martínez recalls watching her husband, so happy he couldn't hold back tears. "Everybody was so elated. My husband couldn't even talk; he cried." She continues with a laugh, "you know, he worked so hard to get everything done. And when it was done! Ohh! He said it was the most wonderful thing!"

A well-baby clinic

In south phoenix during the 1940s, life was still difficult. Many homes still had dirt floors. Returning veterans struggled to find housing and community health was faltering. To make matters worse, there was little worthwhile medical help for those who lived south of the train tracks in Phoenix. Father Emmett McLoughlin's labor of love, St. Monica hospital, was opened in 1944, but many people were poor and unable to use its services. In 1948, McLoughlin would resign from priesthood to focus on his job as hospital superintendent and improve its

services. But others still found they had to take up the slack for poorer communities.

Post 41 hoped to do its part in easing the problem. The Post set up a temporary barracks building and began to plan out a new well-baby clinic. It was the Women's Auxiliary that would end up running the clinic.

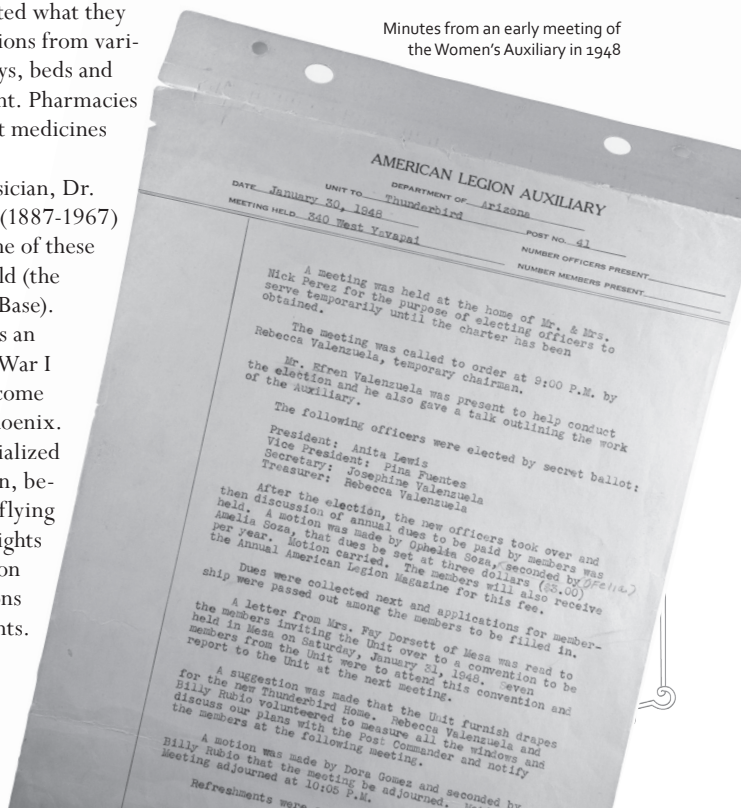
But first, they needed money, doctors and medical supplies to get started. Fortunately, raising funds and working with good connections were something they had mastered during the construction of their new Post building. The unspoken force behind these fundraising efforts was the women of Post 41; they planned the sales, the parties and the dances. On December 2nd, 1949, a benefit dance was held to raise the money needed.[20]

Members contributed what they could, gathering donations from various institutions; gurneys, beds and basic medical equipment. Pharmacies would also donate what medicines they could.

A well-known physician, Dr. Joseph Madison Greer (1887-1967) helped appropriate some of these supplies from Luke Field (the future Luke Air Force Base). Dr. Greer had served as an army doctor in World War I and would go on to become an interim mayor of Phoenix. After the War, he specialized in handicapped children, becoming known as "the flying doctor" for his many flights to the Navajo reservation and other remote regions of Arizona to see patients.

Greer also took ownership of a ranch in Benson, Arizona, where he befriended the nearby Yañez family. Through the 1920s and 1930s he would raise two of the Yañez girls as his foster children, Matilde and "Suse".

Matilde "Tillie" Yañez was enabled to go to a Flagstaff teachers' college where she became a nurse, and worked alongside Dr. Greer for the rest of his career. She had served in World War II as a captain in the Army Nurse Corp. She was a chief nurse in a combat zone hospital on the island of Luzon during the fight to free the Philippines from Japanese forces. The other girl, Suse, was trained as a secretary and managed Dr. Greer's medical practice and business affairs for more than 40 years.



Minutes from an early meeting of the Women's Auxiliary in 1948

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

DEPARTMENT OF Arizona
UNIT TO Thunderbird
POST NO. 41
DATE January 30, 1948
MEETING HELD 340 West Yavapai
NUMBER OFFICERS PRESENT
NUMBER MEMBERS PRESENT

A meeting was held at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Nick Perez for the purpose of electing officers to serve temporarily until the charter has been obtained.

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 P.M. by Rebecca Valenzuela, temporary chairman.

Mr. Efren Valenzuela was present to help conduct the election and he also gave a talk outlining the work of the Auxiliary.

The following officers were elected by secret ballot:

President: Anita Lewis
Vice President: Pina Fuentes
Secretary: Josephine Valenzuela
Treasurer: Rebecca Valenzuela

After the election, the new officers took over and then discussion of annual dues to be paid by members was held. A motion was made by Ophelia Soza, seconded by Amelia Soza, that dues be set at three dollars ($3.00) per year. Motion carried. The members will also receive the Annual American Legion Magazine for this fee.

Dues were collected next and applications for membership were passed out among the members to be filled in.

A letter from Mrs. Fay Dorsett of Mesa was read to the members inviting the Unit over to a convention to be held in Mesa on Saturday, January 31, 1948. Seven members from the Unit were to attend this convention and report to the Unit at the next meeting.

A suggestion was made that the Unit furnish drapes for the new Thunderbird Home. Rebecca Valenzuela and Billy Rubio volunteered to measure all the windows and discuss our plans with the Post Commander and notify the members at the following meeting.

A motion was made by Dora Gomez and seconded by Billy Rubio that the meeting be adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 10:05 P.M.

Refreshments were

Women's Auxiliary member Matilde and her sister Suse were on hand to help start the Post's well-baby clinic, and to recruit other nurses to the task. But Dr. Greer was also joined by Dr. Lowell C. Wormley, an African American member of Thunderbird Post 41.

Wormley had come to Arizona in 1942 from Washington D.C. as a captain in the Medical Corps at the Fort Huachuca Hospital, then as chief of surgery at Poston Hospital, near Parker where he tended to a Japanese internment camp. Liking Arizona, he set up practice in the Salt River Valley. When Wormley arrived, there were only two other black doctors in town: Dr. Dave Solomon and Dr. Winston.[21]

With supplies, doctors and nurses at the ready, Post 41 opened its clinic in December of 1949.

In a 1998 interview with historian Jean Reynolds, Ray Martínez recalled the day the clinic first opened, "It was unbelievable… The legion was full; Grant Park in front was full; in front of the Post was full. I think we had 122 babies. The Women's Auxiliary... ran the whole thing. Matilda was the nurse and Sue [sic], who was already experienced as a clerk, set up the whole system. Sue took care of all the clerical and follow-up… Dr. Joseph and Sue Greer gave us $400.00 to start it… for supplies."

Post member Florencio "Lencho" Othon recalls that the well-baby clinic was "right next to the building there. It was an old barracks building. From there, we had a little walkway—about four feet… And then if I remember right, we had one girl that would be here most of the week, for working mothers that would come over … with their younger kids. That was quite a deal."

Together Dr. Wormley and Dr. Greer helped by administering shots or prescribing medicine for babies and toddlers. Services were free, and the doctors often set up parenting classes.

The Yañez's sister-in-law, Clara—wife of Marcos de Niza Public Housing Project director, Roy Yañez—also donated her time to the clinic. Many of the Auxiliary members were trained nurses, taking turns volunteering to see to families' medical needs.

Minnie Martínez recalls that she and other Auxiliary women gave, "whatever help we could give to the doctors or the nurses, like handing them things, towels, or cleaning up messes, or disposing when they gave the shots… [we] set it up for them before they came and then cleaned up after them. There were a lot of ladies that went in to volunteer." [22]

Though there had been other well-baby clinics, such as one run by the Friendly House in the early 1940s and sponsored by the Harmony Club of Phoenix, this was the first such clinic run by the Mexican American community in Phoenix, and was mainly frequented by poor Mexican American mothers who had no other health services available to them.

The clinic operated until the early 1950s, when newer clinics opened and St. Monica Hospital had become more established.[23]

Dancing through the 1950s

A CROWD GATHERED AT THE platform of the train station in Phoenix. Soldiers and their families milled about saying their goodbyes. It was 1951. Less than five years after World War II ended, the conflict in Korea was America's newest war. Many soldiers found themselves staying longer in the service or being called back to active duty.

Post 41 Auxiliary member Rita Brock-Perini remembers the scene well. Her father, Pedro Abeytia, was returning to service, after already having served in World War II. She was there as a young girl at her mother's side, and younger children in tow, "My father had joined the National Guard, because most of the men at Post 41 were in the Guard at that time. Lo and behold, they were asked to go to Korea. And, so...we went down to the railroad station, and that's where they shipped out."

Jack Williams was there interviewing families for KOY radio, where he was program director four years before going on to become mayor of Phoenix and later, governor of Arizona. Press photographers snapped shots as the crowd milled about. The Abeytia family was interviewed.

Rita continues, "And Mr. Williams worked with KOY at the time, and he did the interview. He interviewed mom and dad, talked to me, and one of my other sisters. ... I don't know if theirs was the only group that was leaving. But to me, as a child, it seemed like there were soldiers everywhere. I was just stunned at how many people were there. We knew that dad was leaving, and that some of his friends were going with him. But I don't think we were prepared to see him leave."

Photo courtesy of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary

A night of entertainment at Post 41

Together, the Abeytia family stood in the waving crowd as the train came to life and pulled away. Everyone started calling out and yelling their goodbyes as the soldiers rolled down the track. The train faded into the distance.

"Then all of a sudden there was no crowd at all. It was just this dead silence, and I remember standing there and just clinging to my mother, wondering what was gonna happen next. ... There was this silence for

the longest time, and then everybody began to cry. And for me, I sort of understood that my father was going to be going away for a long time, but the four littlest didn't. They kept looking at me and mom."

Families wandered back to their houses, and life in the barrios continued. The Riverside Ballroom and Calderón Ballroom were dance halls where the community could blow off steam and wait for this new generation of soldiers to come home safe. It wasn't uncommon to see friends from across the Valley wander in to dance and flirt. Boxing lessons were given in a nearby church. Folklórico dancing was taught to the girls in Grant Park. Movies were shown on the sides of buildings for those who couldn't afford a night at the movie theatre. They entertained themselves as best they could, and continued to fight for a better community.

American Legion Thunderbird Post 41, in uniting the community, was fast becoming another destination as well. They had an event for every holiday that came along and held dances on the weekends.

Auxiliary members dishing food at a Post 41 event. At center is Duvy Jacques. On the right is Martha Murillo.

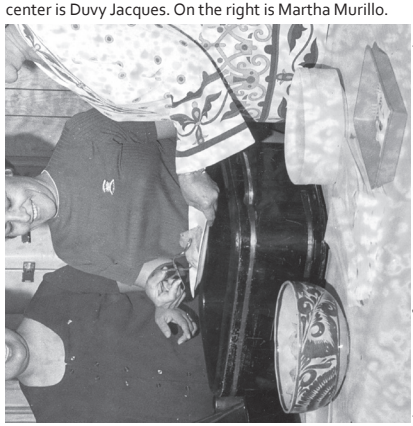


Photo courtesy of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary

The 1950s found the Women's Auxiliary busy organizing holiday celebrations, cooking meals for meetings, arranging events in Grant Park, across the street from the new Post. One Auxiliary member volunteered to chaperone the Grant Park Campfire Girls. Others provided transportation for the girls' softball teams at Grant and Harmon Park.[24]

Grant Park was an important part of Post 41's community involvement. The Post 41 Women's Auxiliary had shown its appreciation of the park's importance by honoring the senior park director, Laura A. Clelland, as "Lady of the Year" for her guidance and dedication to the community two years before, in 1948. With her efforts, the world around Grant Park had become a hub of community life, with the American Legion Post 41 now standing sentry.

Clelland started at the park in 1935, quickly implementing several programs, from a boys and girls club to sports teams and helping the children produce their own plays. She also began the community's first weekly night programs of music, dancing, chorus groups, orchestras, community singing, amateur contests, aquatic pageants and dances.

In the late 1930s, Clelland had lobbied for improvements to the park, such as new lighting, planting grass, and construction of a fence around the pool. By the 1950s, Grant Park was sponsoring an arts and crafts program where children were shown plaster-casting techniques, and adults learned leather tooling, metal work, and costume making.

The series of classes in Folklórico dance that Clelland organized are still remembered

fondly to this day. She had pulled together a dance troupe, complete with authentic styled costumes and the girls performed at military camps and various community gatherings.

Several current Post 41 Auxiliary members, such as Josie Herrera and Mary Córdova, remember the folklórico lessons quite well. Mary Córdova recalls, "growing up… across the park, we were involved in these folklóricos where we learned how to dance and stuff. I remember also, going to the American Legion as a young, young, young girl and performing our Mexican dances right there when they had their fiestas, so that's how far back I go."[25]

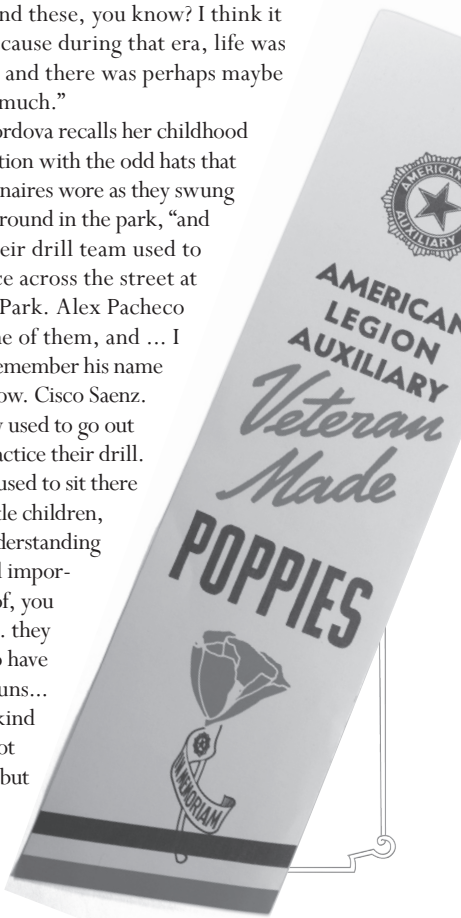
Mary Córdova describes the scene of Grant Park as a focal point for much of her childhood. "I grew up right… across the street from the Legion on Third Avenue and Grant—across the street from Grant Park. So, as an infant, as a toddler, our lives have evolved around the Grant Park area. Before that building was built, where our house was, we had access to seeing the American Legion as it stood in the beginning, before they added the big hall. And so I had the opportunity of just… being able to capture everything that was happening on the outside and we grew up just being part of the American Legion family right there."

Mary continues, describing one of the many events that the Legionnaires would put on for the community, "They used to call them the *jamaicas*. It's like a festival they'd have every year. At that time, they'd block off 2nd Avenue… They would block off the street. And I remember going to those, and they had booths and they had games and entertainment."[26]

Córdova also remembers a stage at Grant Park, where Thunderbird Post 41 held events before Espiridion "Piro" Murillo convinced them to expand their building, and helped fund the construction of its Thunderbird Hall in the 1950s. "Before they built the big hall where they now have their indoor stages, you know. At Grant Park at that time, they had like a stage, so to speak—think back to the '50s—so some of their events were held across the street, 'cause of the convenience of having the stage."

"And then I remember at that time, there were so many people that used to attend these, you know? I think it was because during that era, life was slower and there was perhaps maybe not as much."

Córdova recalls her childhood fascination with the odd hats that Legionnaires wore as they swung rifles around in the park, "and also their drill team used to practice across the street at Grant Park. Alex Pacheco was one of them, and … I can't remember his name right now. Cisco Saenz. So they used to go out and practice their drill. So we used to sit there like little children, not understanding the full importance of, you know… they used to have their guns… it was kind of … not funny, but



we just couldn't understand the meaning of it at that age. Now, this is going back to how young I was, you know? I got to see the drill team in action, practicing, at a very young age. And little did I know that, from there to now, all the importance all these great things that were happening was such an impact. They stayed instilled in me, the images I had."[27]

Another lasting memory for many residents was dancing. On Friday and Saturday nights, the barrios really came to life as couples dressed up and went to the local dance halls. It had become a tradition of sorts to meet in the area. As early as the 1930s, when Ray Martínez was recreation director at the East Madison Street Settlement on Ninth Street and Madison, dances were often held to unite the community. It served as a literal common ground for the Mexican American communities to the east and west, unless somebody started flirting with someone's girlfriend and punches were thrown.

Not only did Post 41's bring the community together like clockwork every weekend for dances; these nights also gave an excuse to interact more casually with politicians, activists and the like. Minnie Martínez fondly recalls dancing with local icons of the community, "Lincoln Ragsdale—he often attended meetings. He loved to dance with me. He was a good dancer, I didn't mind it!"

Barry Goldwater was a good friend of the Martínez family and also could be seen on the dance floor at Post 41. When asked who was the better dancer, Lincoln or Goldwater, Minnie replies instantly, "Barry Goldwater, oh!" Then she continues, "He was one of our best friends. Oh! He loved my tortillas and hot sauce," she states as a matter-of-fact. A smile plays across her face as she enjoys an old compliment from years gone by.[28]

Auxiliary member and former president Frances Tovar, recalls how Post 41 had become so integral to the community. A night of dancing was something to look forward to. She had married quite young, and with a child, her free time was rare. The goals and mission of the American Legion were not understood by Tovar at the time, "We could go into the Legion. And this is where you would go for weddings and parties and dances and stuff. We always thought the Legion was nothing but to go dancing and to drink. For years that's what I thought until my brothers went to the service and came back. Then as I grew older I started learning more."

One thing Auxiliary members like Frances Tovar don't remember about the dances is standing still, "I don't remember ever sitting down... just standing, dancing all night!"

Just like their dances, when it came to projects for the community, the Post 41 Auxiliary members never stood still.

Taking up causes

The auxiliary's contributions would eventually grow to include more than day-to-day activities at the Post.

In 1948, Post 41 was hoping to convince the Phoenix City Council to allocate local tax funds for the improvement of elementary schools in the Mexican American communities south of downtown. The Post members were told a bond issue vote was the only way to authorize what they wanted.

So the Post members took to the streets,

registering voters and raising awareness of the bond issue to be voted on.

Thunderbird Post 41 assembled a group to canvass the neighborhoods and convince residents to vote for this bond issue. Ray Martínez joined Auxiliary members such as Carmen Vildosola, and the Auxiliary past president's mother Enriqueta Lewis, Adam Diaz, Henry Montiel, Ernest Carrillo, Rita Castillo, Anita Ferrá, Adelina Robledo and others in this effort.[29]

And so, with a bond election at hand, they mobilized. For a month and a half, the women knocked on doors during the day while their husbands worked. In the evenings, the men would join in the effort. After one failed attempt, they saw their bond issue finally pass the same year. The schools would receive their facility upgrades.

This wasn't the last time the men and women of Post 41 knocked on community doors to push through elections. Another bond issue during the late 1940s involving money to improve the Grant, Central and Harmon Parks in the barrio brought the women out again to canvass. Again, they were successful in mobilizing the residents to vote, and $365,000 was appropriated for the parks.

Ray Martínez explained, later, that even though gaining the funding for park improvements was a victory, "the real value was to show people that these things could be done, if you were unified and had a good purpose and mind to help people, help the community..."

Such was the time they were living in. The Post's first canvassing effort came in 1948—a full year before the well-known Community Service Organization (CSO) canvassed Mexican American communities in Los Angeles to elect the first Hispanic City Council member in 75 years, Edward Roybal. Homegrown efforts were producing results across the United States. At a local level, the Thunderbird Post 41 was empowered by the middle ground on which its members often stood, and by political connections through men like Barry Goldwater.

These were people of the barrio, who had begun to create their own middle class and carve out inroads to political and financial success. But surrounding them was an impoverished neighborhood that still struggled to provide food and homes to their families. Post 41 was in a unique position to help the community from which it had grown, and to mobilize the barrios into taking an

In 2009, Eleanor Abeytia looks back through memories in a photo album.

Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

active role in changing their circumstances. They often made their presence known in literal terms, by fitting every person they could into the Phoenix City Hall, when they wanted the city's power-brokers and politicians to acknowledge their needs.

Friendships born

Working so closely together can build lifelong bonds. This is seen in the interconnected Mexican American communities of Phoenix. But it can be even stronger between two individuals. The Women's Auxiliary often created close friendships between the women who worked together. These were often women who stayed home to tackle the even more demanding task of raising their children and tending to their families' needs. Often, they began to help with the Auxiliary's efforts only when their children were grown enough to help or move out.

Eleanor Abeytia remembers when her husband prompted her to join the Auxiliary, "He kept telling me to join the Auxiliary—that they do a lot of things. I told him my kids were little and I had too many of them. I can't do that and work. I won't be able to go to meetings and anything like that."

It was a valid argument. They had ten children. Abeytia continues, "Finally after he kept on…wanting me to join, I finally did. And I liked it. I got so involved… and I did a lot of the programs that they carry. Like the hospitals… I was hospital chairman one year. And we'd go to the hospital and give bagels and coffee for their meetings or we'd go and read stories to the veterans and… write letters for their families—the ones who couldn't do it."

The children were no problem, they simply took them along and put them to work cleaning up the Thunderbird room for any events they had. A new generation was being introduced to Post 41.

When asked what she treasures most about her time with the Auxiliary, she's humble, quiet. She mentions several of the activities. But soon, it becomes apparent that the Auxiliary gave her something invaluable—her best friend, Nadine.

Some women who lived in the community were isolated, not just by the task of raising a family but by unfamiliarity. They did not have the community ties that come with growing up in the close-knit barrio. While active in the Post, Eleanor may have found it somewhat difficult to form bonds with everyone. She wasn't from the neighborhood. She had grown up as Eleanor Reyes in Aguilar, Colorado—not the barrios of Phoenix. She had come to Phoenix and married her husband Pedro Abeytia in 1937. Before long, she had children to care for.

Then, after her husband's persistent prodding, she joined the Women's Auxiliary. There, she met Nadine Allen. Because Eleanor did not drive, it was often Nadine who would pick her up and take her to the Thursday meetings. This custom became more common in 1961, after Eleanor was elected president of the Auxiliary and she needed to find her way to numerous functions.

To everyone else, Nadine was simply the cheerful character who could always be counted on. But on those drives to the meeting, Nadine and Eleanor talked—and a friendship grew beyond the cheerful exterior.

Photo courtesy of American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary

In the Auxiliary room at Post 41 circa 2004, Left to right, standing: Linda Ortega, Gloria Ramirez,Martha Murillo, Eleanor Abeytia, Bertha Medina, Ofelia Soza. Left to right, sitting: Vivian Padilla, unknown, Juanita "Jenny" Lechuga

Eleanor took to chastising Nadine for her high heels; she loved heels and the higher the better. It was common for Nadine's feet to trip up in those shoes and send her stumbling forward or setting Eleanor off to scolding again, "Don't wear those shoes!"

When Eleanor became regional vice president over all the Arizona Women's Auxiliary Posts, it was Nadine who drove her across the state, from city to city to meet with the different Posts.

Through the years, they pushed on, the closest of friends. It was with great sadness that Eleanor received the phone call that her best friend had entered the hospital with a brain tumor. Eleanor's daughter, Rita Brock-Perini, wondered aloud, "as a nurse, now, my feeling is that she probably had a difficulty with her equilibrium as a result of that tumor that was probably growing, and nobody ever knew it." A reason why she couldn't stand steady in the high heels she so loved.

Rita spent time at Nadine's bedside in the final days, feeding her when she could not do it herself. Within two weeks, she succumbed, and Eleanor had lost a friend.

"Interestingly enough," says Rita, "when she died, Lincoln Ragsdale used to be involved with the Post also. And she always used to jokingly say to him, '…when I die, I want my ashes to be sprinkled all over Phoenix.' And everybody used to just kind of chuckle at it, because they thought it was just something she was saying to be funny. But when she died, he did do that for her."

"He took her [ashes] up in his airplane and sprinkled her ashes all over the city. It's illegal to do that. But he did it anyway." [30]

Numerous other friendships have also thrived, such as Frances Tovar and Rosie Lechuga, who became friends when Frances helped then-Auxiliary president Lechuga with her paperwork. Frances rolls her eyes

at the thought of paperwork, but when she was elected president after Lechuga, it was a godsend to have Lechuga returning the favor. Twenty years on, and they never go anywhere without each other.

Engaging leaders and fostering change

The American Legion Post 41 has had strong political connections throughout the years, beginning with Post member Barry Goldwater. Perhaps on this premise, the Auxiliary's first president Anita Lewis Chávez made an attempt at becoming the first Hispanic on the state Legislature. Instead, Chávez watched her neighbor Adam Diaz, and family friend, Valdemar Córdova reach political office on the Phoenix City Council. A fellow law student at the U of A, Raul H. Castro would go on to become governor of Arizona. It would not be until Mary Rose Wilcox's election to Phoenix City Council in 1983, that Hispanic women began to find success in seeking public office.

Having dignitaries as members of the Post only helped their clout. One of the most respected, loved members is Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater was there from the very beginning, not just as a dignitary, not just to dance at events. He listened in at the first meetings, helped obtain the lease for their property, and argued politics over beer in the Post's Ronda Room with fellow legionnaires. He even groomed members for leadership and helped Adam Diaz become the first Mexican American on the Phoenix City Council.

Goldwater's wife, Margaret "Peggy" Goldwater was a member of the Women's Auxiliary, though she contributed more monetarily than by involvement in their activities. She did go to some of the larger functions, and Minnie Martínez recalls riding with her to numerous out-of-town conventions, even flying to the American Legion's 1973 national convention in Hawaii.

Longtime Post 41 member Florencio "Lencho" Othon tells the story of how the Goldwaters became lifetime members, "He used to come down and work around, look around and do things for the Post. As a matter of fact, when we were building a second addition to the Post, Barry loaned us…he gave us, I think it was about $3,500, which was a heck of a lot of money at that time for the refrigeration unit we wanted to put in there. We didn't have the money. So he gave us a check for $3,500 so that we would continue with the project. Later on I started a bingo program with the intent of making enough money to pay back Barry Goldwater—which we did, after a year or two…"

"…we presented a check to him, and … he said 'we didn't give you a loan'…'that was our contribution to the Post.' So he wouldn't accept the check. So I told his wife that it will make the boys feel better if he would accept it."

The Post decided to make Goldwater a lifetime member at that point. He had already done enough for them to earn that appreciation.

"But," Lencho continues, "about a couple of weeks later, we got a check in the mail for, I think it was close to $3,500 or something like that as a donation. So what are you going to do?" In a subsequent interview, Lencho admitted finding out it was Auxiliary

member Peggy Goldwater that had anonymously donated the money.

Though national politics would begin to pull the Goldwaters away from Phoenix's social life and Post 41, there were other dignitaries that frequented the Post's events or were members of the Legion and the Auxiliary.

A longtime Phoenix civil rights activist in the black community, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, was also a member of Thunderbird Post 41 Women's Auxiliary. She came to the dances and often invited Post members to gatherings at her home. But she, like Peggy Goldwater, contributed to the Auxiliary's projects with money, rather than direct involvement. Eleanor was certainly not idle with her time in the community, though.

Eleanor and her husband, Lincoln, had moved to Phoenix where she began her career as a kindergarten teacher at Dunbar Elementary School. Soon, they opened up a profitable mortuary business. As life became financially easier for them they decided to buy a nicer house. Quickly, the Ragsdales became involved in the struggle for civil rights, after they purchased their new home in a traditionally white community. As a teacher, Eleanor had become frustrated watching fellow African American teachers struggle to find good quality housing. She decided to become a real estate agent.

With considerable knowledge of the real estate industry and a fair amount of cunning, Eleanor broke one of Phoenix's color barriers. Since she was quite light-skinned, Eleanor was allowed to view homes for sale that other blacks would not have been permitted into. With precise English and an educated air, she never mentioned her race and was never questioned, thanks to real estate agents' rigid view of race and color. In this manner, the Ragsdales picked out their own home in the Encanto District—a restricted Anglo community.

When they were refused the home, the Ragsdales simply stepped around the community's restrictions, by having a white friend buy the home. Then, while the contract was still in escrow, its title was transferred to the Ragsdales. Though an achievement in itself, their struggle was not over. The Ragsdales would face immediate harassment, and several years of harsh community reaction.

During the 17 years the Ragsdales lived in their Encanto District home, they tackled race issues on numerous fronts, working together with several leaders in Phoenix, including members of Post 41 such as "Lito" Peña who joined Lincoln Ragsdale in an effort to unite the black and Mexican American communities. "Very cordial, very elegant people," were the words that Auxiliary member Eleanor Abeytia used to describe the Ragsdales.

To this day, Post 41 continues the tradition of recruiting politicians and influential leaders as members. 2009-10 Auxiliary president Josie Herrera admits, "We have a lot of dignitaries as members. They come to visit, and we grab them as members... [Representative Ben] Miranda, he's also a member ...Actual members, their dues are paid. I remember Anna María [Chávez] came—I met her at Girls State. Anna María is a 'Girls Stater'. So that year I went to Girls State—it was last year—she was the principal speaker at the big event we have. Afterwards, I ran up to her, 'Anna María! Anna María, I want you

Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

Lorraine Vásquez in 2009. She served as Post 41 Auxiliary President in 1972.

to come and speak! You have to come speak to our ladies!' And she did. Well, when she was here, she couldn't leave without joining."

Because Anna María Chavez served at the time as then-Governor Janet Napolitano's Deputy Chief of Staff for Urban Relations and Community Development, there was hope her membership might help Post 41 in its community interests.

But these 'feather in the cap' members of the Post are not their only political efforts. The American Legion also hopes it can inspire new politicians. Mention the Boys State/Girls State program to anyone today at Post 41's Women's Auxiliary and they all bring up Lorraine Vásquez, one of their former presidents who put in several years as a volunteer nurse as well as helping in numerous other ways. What she contributes to—is one of the Legion's oldest traditions.

Back in 1935, Hayes Kennedy, a law teacher at Loyola University in Chicago, overheard some of his students' conversations and political beliefs, he caught wind of a program called Young Pioneer Camps. It was a summer camp program promoted by members of the Communist Party to teach high school students the values of their political system over Democracy. As the Americanism Chairman in the Illinois Department of the American Legion, he was incensed. Kennedy contacted Harold L. Card, a high school teacher who also served as the Legion's local Boy Scout Chairman. Together they put together a program to counter the Young Pioneer Camps and teach the values and importance of a Democratic government.

The National American Legion approved the idea, and by June of 1935, newspapers announced the Legion was to hold a boys' civic camp for 1,500 boys from across Illinois. This first Boys State event would be held at the Illinois State Fair. In 1937, Girls State was founded to do the same for young women, and Girls Nation was formed the following year.

Since their inception, Boys State/Girls State, and Boys Nation/Girls Nation have become one of the most respected leadership training opportunities for high school students in the United States. In this role-playing exercise in government training, high school students recreate a political state.

The National Girls State organization explains that participants learn how to participate in the functioning of their

state's government in preparation for their future roles as responsible adult citizens. Two girls are selected from each Girls State program to attend Girls Nation, a national government training program. Girls Nation "senators" meet for a week in Washington, D.C., where they run for political office, campaign for the passage of legislation and possibly meet with state representatives and senators. Capping off the week of Girls Nation is oftentimes a meeting with the President of the United States at the White House.

U.S. President William Jefferson Clinton was selected for Boys Nation and shook President Kennedy's hand in the White House's Rose Garden—as shown in a famous 1963 photograph. A young Janet Napolitano was selected as a junior at Sandia High school in the early 1970s to participate in the Girls state. She won election to the post of lieutenant governor; a presage to her eventual election as governor of Arizona in 2002.

At Phoenix's American Legion Post 41, two-time Women's Auxiliary president Lorraine Vásquez has made these programs her passion over the years, "Boys State. I volunteered for that for 20 years... The boys that are going to be seniors—they are hand picked. They don't have to be academically in the highs... for potential leadership they're picked. ... The boys go to Flagstaff, NAU, for a week. The girls go to U of A, in Tucson."

"And the program... is a mock program. They have the National and the Federal parties. And then they're assigned to cities. They pick their own mayors. They have their charter. Then if you go up to county, on the county level, they have a law school. They have to pass their boards, they have patrol there, a patrol school. And they write tickets for the court."

"Then the boys... two boys from the state, and two alternates, go to Washington D.C. for the National, and it's called Boys' Nation. Then they meet their congressman, they get bills and they're called senators. Many times, these congressmen over there use these bills...and with Girl's State too."

"It's intense, real intense program, and they really get into it," she concludes with enthusiasm and pride in her eyes.

Through the years, Boys State and Girls State are a continuation of the tradition of civic involvement in Arizona and across the nation. At Post 41, Lorraine Vásquez represents this commitment to the community and its future leaders. Such is the spirit of the Auxiliary.

Shifting focus

In 1960, the political scene was changing. Nationally, John Kennedy was in the middle of an historic battle for the U.S. presidency. Hispanics had already found some affinity for Kennedy as a Catholic, but a stronger effort was needed to truly get their attention. The Kennedy campaign decided to reach out to the Hispanic population after some prodding by regionally known Hispanic politicians Edward Roybal of California, Senator Dennis Chávez of New Mexico and Henry Gonzalez of Texas. Campaign staff-member Carlos McCormick, of Tucson, was chosen to organize this outreach program.

Local organizations across the U.S. like the GI Forum and the Alianza Hispano Americana in Phoenix stepped up to the challenge and formed Viva Kennedy clubs, in hopes of delivering the Mexican American vote for Kennedy.

Again, one of the root contact points could be found in the same tight-knit Hispanic communities of Phoenix. Former Phoenix city councilman and Post 41 member, Adam Diaz was named chairman of the Viva Kennedy statewide effort in Arizona. And though the state would not successfully give Kennedy its electoral nod, the Viva Kennedy efforts seemed to jumpstart a new generation of Hispanic participation in local politics. The 1960 election would herald a changing of the guard as new institutions formed to take over the fight for equality, just as Post 41 had stood on the shoulders of organizations that had come before it.

The outreach of the Kennedy campaign could not have been better timed, either. Mexican Americans like Adam Diaz were finding success in local politics. Many Hispanics had begun to look even higher, lining up to take the national arena by force. Communities had been mobilized and the Chicano Movement was just around the corner.

In November of 1960, Kennedy was elected. Soon, more than 40 Hispanics were appointed to his administration. The door to national politics had opened a little for Hispanics nationwide.

Mexican American women also enjoyed the fruits of the Kennedy campaign. One of New Mexico's most prominent female politicians, Concha Ortiz y Pina de Kleven was named to the National Council of La Raza's Upward Bound Program in the Department of Education. In Arizona, María Luisa Legarro Urquides of Tucson, was named to the Arizona State Advisory Committee to the Civil Rights Commission. She also served on the National "Viva Kennedy Clubs" board.[31]

In November 1963, the civil rights movement was galvanized by tragedy when President Kennedy was assassinated. Though he had not made wholesale improvements to race relations in the U.S., he gave unexpected acknowledgment of the problem.

Meanwhile, Phoenix's Post 41 and the Women's Auxiliary would continue their efforts to improve the quality of life for its members and the community around them.

Two years later, in 1965, a news article showed Post 41 still hard at work in the community. Legionnaires and the Auxiliary had donated more than $50,000 to help nearly 3,000 children in need. During that summer, the Post covered fees for more than 500 children who couldn't afford to swim at Grant Park—repaid by picking up trash around the park to show civic pride. When a report showed less than eight percent of kids in the barrios could afford to see a movie, the Post spent money to show films at various parks in the community.

Sponsoring one Little League team wasn't enough for Post 41, that year. They sponsored the entire league and bought the trophies. And at the end of the year, the legionnaires and the Auxiliary went all out. Christmas had become an especially lively time for the children. More than 500 kids attended the Post's Christmas party

in 1965, and more than 200 Christmas baskets were given to families in need.

It would also be the year that Post member Tony F. Soza made an attempt at becoming commander of the Arizona department of the American Legion, losing to Ed Sawyer of Bisbee. But the peaceful times were not to last.

March of 1965 would see a war in Vietnam escalate. Months earlier, the USS Maddox and the USS Turner Joy were reported as being under attack in the Gulf of Tonkin. Days after, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave President Lyndon Johnson unprecedented authority to deal with the Vietnam situation.

Incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Post 41's own Barry Goldwater in a presidential election, and began his new term on January 20th, 1965. Less than two months later, bombing of North Vietnam started and U.S. Marines were landed in the south.

Current Post 41 Auxiliary president Josie Herrera recalls the pain of wondering where her husband was in these early days of the war, "I suffered that when my husband was in the service. We finished high school, and he went right in to the service. And I married him 2 years later. My daughter was 5 months old when she met him the first time, because it was starting of the Vietnam War and they were gone all the time. And I remember … he was in the Navy. But I was not aware of what was happening. We got married, then… he was gone. Two weeks later his aunt tells me "well maybe he didn't realize what he did and he's not coming back.' And I said 'he can't be' but it was that the ship was going back and forth taking marines to Vietnam and it was hush-hush because the war was just starting."

As events in Vietnam were evolving into a full-scale war, a growing civil rights battle was also brewing in the U.S. The Black Panther Party and the National Organization for Women (NOW) both formed the in 1966 and numerous Chicano student activists groups were appearing across the nation. Just as World War II had sparked change twenty years before, another generation was making itself heard and stepping out of the barrios, into an entire metropolis that was stretching its legs, from Glendale and Phoenix to Mesa and Tempe.

Louise Vildosola in 2009. Though a founding member of Post 41, she would not become active until the 1960s. In 1971, she served as Auxiliary President

Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

A night of dancing and music was no longer limited to Post 41 or the nearby dance halls that had stood for decades as gathering places. New clubs were popping up across the Valley. Mexican American student organizations were forming at Arizona State University to fight for fair wages at local laundries. By the end of 1965, news came of race riots in Watts, California. Concerns grew fervent over the war in Vietnam, and the external world's turmoil was creeping in to shake things up for Phoenix.

Vietnam years

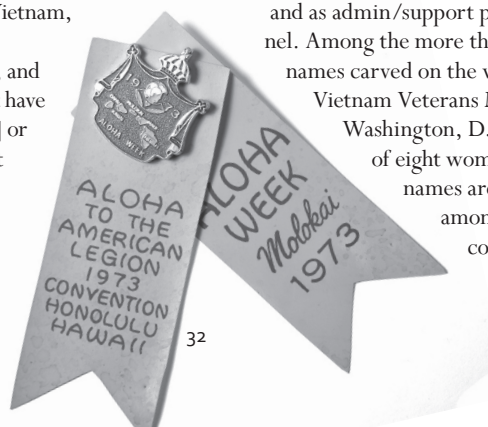
The frustration of waiting for news of a son or husband at war seemed unbearable in the hearts of mothers, wives and sisters. This was turning into a new kind of war, too. Their men were somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam and few families really understood what for. Back at home, wives watched over children that did not understand why dad was gone at all. Others were caught in the pain of having more than one family member in the service.

Auxiliary member Frances Tovar remembers the sadness when two of her brothers got drafted, and she had to watch them take turns in Vietnam, "When my brother Manuel was in Vietnam, they had already put my brother Ralph [on] leave, and at that time you couldn't have two brothers in [combat] or whatever. ...but they just had him on hold."

"Now my brother Manuel, knowing what was going on over there, kept extending his tour, hoping that they wouldn't take my brother. After a while he couldn't extend it anymore. As soon as he hit the States, sure enough, two weeks later they took my brother Ralph to Vietnam. ...He left, I think in August, and by October we started getting telegrams where he was real sick. He ended up with malaria. ... He was real sick... his temperature level was so high his head extend to his shoulder. ...So it was scary. Especially since watching my brother who had just come [home], feeling so bad ... he kept saying 'I didn't want him to go.'"[32]

But there were also women serving in the Vietnam War, usually as nurses. How many is not known because the Armed Forces never kept good records of their service. They seldom served in any combat situation, as the male-oriented Armed Forces had not—nor wanted to—train women for combat.

A 1991 paper by curator/archivist Christine Marín, of Arizona State University, explains that Census figures do not distinguish between women who actually served in Vietnam and women who were in the military in assignments other than Vietnam. But women did serve in Vietnam. They served as volunteers, nurses, missionaries, journalists, doctors, aerial photographers, and as admin/support personnel. Among the more than 58,000 names carved on the wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., are those of eight women. Their names are interspersed among their male compatriots."[33]



Phoenix, like other places, seemed to be sending an entire generation of soldiers to war. Pedro and Eleanor Abeytia's son Bernie was one of the many who went, signing up just after graduating from West Phoenix High School in 1968. He would serve with the Marines, just as his father had years before.

Soon after, his older sister, current Auxiliary member Rita Brock-Perini decided she had to do her part, as well.

Rita had known since grade school that nursing might be her future. She helped in the school nurse's office, watching in fascination as the woman tended to children. She never told Rita she should be a nurse, but just the same she affected young Rita's future. By 1959, Rita had finished nursing school and began a job—just as she'd promised herself—as a high school nurse.

In 1968, with ten years of nursing experience under her belt, Rita enlisted in the Air Force Medical Corps.

In January of 1969, she went to Wichita Falls for an orientation that showed the Military's frantic rush to put officers into their duty stations. "We were the 6 week wonders. …our training was brief. I think they took us out on 2 bivouacs. They took us out to… actually it was just over the border of Texas and Oklahoma."

But the weather would not cooperate with the trainees. In January 1969, a winter storm raged across the panhandle of Texas and Oklahoma, tearing down power lines and shutting down towns. The landscape became a bog, and the trainees were up to their knees in mud, with only flimsy ponchos to protect them against the elements.

"They got worried that they might not be able to get us out of there. And so they sent buses for us."

Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

Rita Brock-Perini, left, celebrates Veterans' Day with Auxiliary President Josephine Herrera in 2009.

"And the buses got stuck."

"And then they really got concerned about it, because it was very cold. We didn't have anything in terms of coats or jackets. All we had were those goofy ponchos—and our fatigues. And that won't keep you warm in wet, windy climate."

She laughs, remembering the helicopters arrival to lift the women out, one day into their training. Then, they would make a second attempt to train her group—and found themselves in yet another winter storm.

"They sent us back again for the second week, and we were supposed to be out there for 7 days. And we did do… 6 days. The seventh day they have to pull us out again… in helicopters, because it got so muddy and windy."

They had gotten through one task—a self-extraction challenge where they had to find their way back to a rendezvous point with busses waiting.

"And when they got us back we were just

gonna do just routine stuff and the storm hit that night. So by 3:00 in the morning they had to get us out by chopper. Because the winds were getting so strong, they were afraid they wouldn't be able to get the helicopters in."

After her troubled training experience, Rita was sent to Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio. There, the Air Force had a full research facility, and it was needed to tackle the new diseases that soldiers were bringing home from a foreign land.

In Vietnam, wounded soldiers went from the battlefield to a triage location as close to the front line as possible. If the men needed hospitalization they were flown to Japan for a second triage. Finally, they were flown to Wilford Hall. Often, by the time the soldiers reached Rita's care, they were in the worst possible shape—or dead. One of the most terrible and more common medical injuries were not gunshot wounds, but the results of a primitive wooden booby trap.

Rita Brock-Perini hugs her brother, Bernie Abeytia, as he arrives home from Vietnam.

Photo courtesy Rita Brock-Perini

"A lot of the troops that were infantry would come to us with the terrible, terrible, leg injuries because of those Pongee sticks. They used to soak them in feces. And then put them in the ground so the kids would step on them and it would go through their boot and into their foot. And if they didn't get treated soon enough they lost the leg, and maybe even worse because it would spread through the blood system very quickly... And we used to take them off the plane and immediately start treating them while they were on their stretcher. We were changing IV's and putting on very, very strong antibiotics to try and get control of an infection before it created any problems as far as their limb was concerned. We were trying to save the limb initially. We certainly didn't want it to spread any further than the limb."

It was always with trepidation that she approached the arriving patients. The thought of pulling back a gurney's blanket to possibly find her brother wounded or dying was a haunting fear every time the plane landed. Then, one very real scare sent her home to be there for her frantic mother. News had come that her brother Bernie was missing in action. Fortunately, he and his fellow soldiers had only gotten lost for a short time in the forests of Vietnam, and Rita returned to Texas to tend to wounded soldiers.

With so many young soldiers returning with injuries, it became a challenge working with the young nurses, who had not experienced such trauma. Rita explains, "At that time they had a lot of ... they were

literally kids. They were like 17... I was 30."

"And I'd had 10 years of nursing experience before I decided to enlist. I was kind of a senior. There were about three of us that were senior nurses. We had a good 10 years at least. But we also had new university graduates. It was a horrendous experience for them. ... Emotionally, they weren't prepared to deal with the death and dying. You know? I mean, it was an everyday thing."

"The young nurses just weren't up to it. Their skills were not that good. And, you had to be very quick thinking you had to move fast. And you had to make a lot of decisions... you know, if you didn't have a doctor next to you, and somebody was going to die—or not—you did what you had to do."

"We had several [nurses] who OD'd.

"We had some who would just walk into a room, try to do something, and things would get out of control, sit down on the floor and just cry. They couldn't do anything else."

It was difficult work for Rita and the older nurses. They worked 12-hour shifts, in 10-day rotations. If somebody was sick or not up to the task, somebody had to forfeit a day off to cover. They had to be strong, where younger nurses fell apart. Meanwhile, the wounded kept coming. Sometimes the patients were local soldiers who hadn't even gone to war yet. Living in such close quarters, the young soldiers were under pressure to complete their training. In an attempt to finish, the young men would hide that they were feeling sick, only coming to the nurses when they were already near dying of meningitis, after having spread the disease to other soldiers. Outbreaks happened every year.

In an effort to find space for the wounded, room capacities were doubled with whatever beds could be found. "We had a back bay, where I think there were supposed to be like 10 beds. And we squeezed 20 beds in there. Sometimes we had them on stretchers in between the beds because that was all that we could do."

At the end of a two-year tour of duty in the Medical Corps, Rita would join the Arizona Red Cross to teach in disaster emergency training seminars.

Slowly, the soldiers began to come home. Bernie returned while his sister Rita was still serving in the Air Force. Friends found it amusing that he would have to salute his higher-ranking sister when he arrived. The newspaper was called to celebrate and capture the moment on camera as they hugged each other as tightly as possible. Her brother had come home seated on a commercial flight, not on a gurney. By the end of 1975, the Vietnam War had ended.

A new generation comes home in the 1970s

The battle for civil liberties continued – though, after a quarter century, it had become a lighter load for Post 41. Much of their effort had contributed to an improved city for Mexican Americans. New voices and new institutions were also taking on the struggle; the Chicano Movement was under way in the barrios of Phoenix and across the United States. The very same grassroots activism that had created Post 41 and helped it to early success, was now creating organizations such as the Mexican American

Student Organization (MASO), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), Chicanos Por La Causa, Valle del Sol and the Southwestern Council for La Raza. Some of these institutions found monetary support from national institutions, giving them more options. This left Post 41 and its Auxiliary some freedom to focus on a more common agenda for American Legion Posts: helping soldiers and their families.

In 1971, Phoenix's American Legion Post 41 was mourning the loss of one its long-time leaders; Tony F. Soza. A ceremony was put together for March 26. 1971. They were renaming American Legion Thunderbird Post 41 to now be called Tony F. Soza Post 41 (They would later repeat the honor for member Ray Martinez's contribution to Post 41, by adding his name after his passing away in 2004).

The newly renamed Post would continue to enjoy a relatively peaceful time throughout the 1970s. A year after Soza's passing, his wife Ofelia Soza would chair the Auxiliary's Arizona convention and a new president was elected—Louise Vildosola—to replace outgoing president Duvy Jáques. A new generation of members had raised their children and found the time to give back, via the Auxiliary. For example, Louise Vildosola had been at the first meeting, yet stepped away to make her way through years of raising a family in Sunnyslope, a divorce and remarriage, only returning for Veterans' Day to help each year. Finally she had come back to take a more active part in the Auxiliary, like her sister Carmen Galindo who had been active for many years and had been president in the 1950s.

With 1972 approaching, the women were getting excited about the next National Convention to be held in Hawaii. Everyone that could go was packing for the trip. Louise recalls that even "Barry Goldwater went with us to the National Convention when it was held in Hawaii. ...I even took a picture."

In 1972 and 1973, the Auxiliary members of Tony F. Soza Post 41 celebrated a little more than usual. Their efforts through the year had garnered recognition. They had received a membership award for obtaining more new Auxiliary members than any other Post; over 200. The Child Welfare award was given for assistance to veterans and families with clothing, books, food baskets and scholarships. They also came home with the Poppy Award and a music award.

They also won the Richard H. Bieri trophy a second year in a row for their accomplishments in working together with Legionnaires. Auxiliary member Lorraine Vásquez tells an amusing story of having won the trophy two years in a row, with the condition that whoever could win the trophy three years in a row would get to keep the trophy, not just watch over it for a year.

Lorraine had become the president after Vildosola, and her husband Rudy was commander of the Post that year. She was quoted then, saying "If we win the Bieri trophy again next year—and we are going all out to try for it—we get to keep it."

They did win again. When they won, there was a mysterious announcement that they'd tied with another Post in Tempe, and that they would share the trophy with the other Post. The trophy was taken away and the three years rule ignored.

The women of the Auxiliary were actively involved in the community through

Past presidents of the Post 41 women's auxiliary

Anita Lewis Chavez	1948	Carmen Othon	1965-66	Juanita Villa	1977-78	Frances Tovar	1994
Tony Padilla	1948-49	Ida Espejo	1966-67	Lucy Ceballos	1978-79	Pauline Garcia	1994-95
Ofelia Soza	1949-50	Ann Miller	1967-68	Connie Hernandez	1979-80	Annie Garza	1995-96
Frances Aros	1950-51	Gertrude Imperial	1968-69	Arsenia Cota	1980-81	Lupe Valenzuela	1996-97
Amelia Soza	1951-52	Gloria Ramirez	1969-70	Bertha Medina	1981-82	Carmelita Ortega	1997-98
Nettie Yanez	1952-53	Duvy Jacques	1970-71	Sally Ortega	1982-83	Pauline Abril	1998-99
Ruth Zamora	1953-54	Louise Vildosola	1971-72	Linda Ortega	1983-84	Lorraine Vasquez	1999-00
Mary Moreno	1954-55	Lorraine Vasquez	1972-73	Rachel Ochoa	1984-85	Connie Hernandez	2000-01
Mary P. Garcia	1955-56	Vivian Padilla	1973-74	Linda Ortega	1985-86	Jessica White	2001-02
Frances Aros	1956-57	Vivian Frink	1974-75	Carmen Arias	1986-87	Juanita Lechuga	2002-03
Carmen Galindo	1957-58	Mary Ramirez	1975	Juanita Lechuga	1987-88	Mary L. Tores	2003-04
Sally Morales	1958-59	Lucy Ceballos	1975-76	Martha Estril	1988-89	Elvira R. Cruz	2004-05
Margaret Roman	1959-60	Alice Cota	1976-77	Isabel Roman	1988-89	Gloria Bonilla	2005-06
Emelina Espinoza	1960-61	Juanita Villa	1977-78	Martha Murillo	1989-90	Patricia Lugo	2006-07
Eleanor Abeytia	1961-62	Lucy Ceballos	1975-76	Lydia Aros	1990-91	Patricia Lugo	2007-08
Nadine Allen	1962-63	Mary Ramirez	1975	Dolores Peña	1991-92	Josephine Herrera	2008-09
Isabel Roman	1963-64	Lucy Ceballos	1975-76	Ruth "Cuca" Moreno	1992-93	Josephine Herrera	2009-10
Cecilia Abeytia	1664-65	Alice Cota	1976-77	Rose Lechuga	1993-94		

dances and yard sales and any other way to raise money for their programs. Trips to the Veterans' Administration hospital to spend time with veterans were common. Auxiliary member Eleanor Abeytia found this one of her favorite contributions. "We'd go to the hospital …they had a Christmas shop…they would assign a veteran for each of the Auxiliary members…and we'd take 'em around and they would pick out the present we had for their families, and then we'd take them over to another table. And they would wrap them for them. And they would mail the ones that need to be mailed and then the ones that were there. We would wrap 'em and give 'em to them, so that when their families came to visit them they would give them their Christmas."

Another Auxiliary member, Martha Murillo was well known for her dedication to the men, whom she fondly called her "boys." All soldiers everywhere, past or present—not just her family or the men at Post 41—were her boys and everything she put effort into at the Post was for them. It was a tradition, and the Auxiliary's love.

Nurturing Tradition

Sometimes tragedy creates tradition. One of the American Legion's missions is helping with the losses of war. Through the Legion, these traditions have often become long-standing programs to help soldiers and their families survive the grief of war and carry on the memory of those who have served.

One is the tradition of the poppy.

Every year, little paper poppy flowers sprout in the hands of veterans. From crepe paper, they are folded and wrapped onto a wire stem, complete with a tag to remind those who wear them of the countless lives that have been lost to war. The tradition spans almost a century.

On November 11th, 1918, at 5 A.M. men huddled together inside a train car somewhere in the forests of France. In the cold dark air, they were about to sign the armistice. The terms of the document said that five hours later, at exactly 11 A.M. on the 11th day of the 11th month, the world's

First World War would end.

When news spread throughout the world, celebrations filled the streets from Cairo to New York. But, the front lines were quiet—in suspended animation as nobody moved despite the news. "Maybe it was only a temporary cease fire," they thought. The cold battlefields between frozen troops were a strange somber place; all broken, churned earth and blood-soaked bodies. In a strange contradiction to the violence, poppy seeds had found a hold in the upturned soil and began sprouting on the battlefields of France and Belgium. It was as if spilt blood had turned to red flowers.

Three years earlier, in 1915, Canadian Colonel John McCrae had watched this same eerie sight on the battlefield at Ypres, Belgium. He wrote a poem to memorialize the poppies he saw, "In Flanders Field."

Almost immediately after this first Armistice Day, the wearing of a poppy became a widely accepted symbol of remembrance for our veterans. In 1921, the American Legion's first National Convention in Kansas City would convene, and the poppy would be named its official memorial flower. Today, crepe-paper poppies are made and given out by the American Legion every year in hopes of raising funds to help soldiers just like those who stood lost, confused at the end of World War I, between the war they knew and a return to peace.

At Phoenix's Post 41, the tradition has continued since 1948, when Lupe Saiz was named the Auxiliary's first Poppy Chairman.

Current Auxiliary member Lorraine Vásquez says, "We used to go to VA hospitals and help make them. … They'd have a little wire, and we'd wire that around… and well, make a flower that had a little tag on there. And it states on there, 'The American Legion; made by hand by a veteran.' So every year, generally on Veterans' Day, we go out and we distribute them. We don't ask them to buy; we ask them to donate… whatever. If you can't donate, wear one anyway; wear a poppy for a veteran."

Josephine Herrera, who has been Auxiliary president two years in a row, is also the poppy chairman for Post 41. In 2007 and 2008, they won the Western Division Poppy Award for their efforts and for the scrapbook that documents it all.

The sweetness of a child's face can be a convincing way to bring compassion out of the community. It's no surprise that the tradition of a poppy queen appeared. Junior members—sometimes a daughter, sometimes a granddaughter—will go around and ask people to wear a poppy.

Josie's granddaughter, Lexis Escudero, is a new generation of the Women's Auxiliary. As Poppy Queen three years in a row for Post 41, she has not only raised money handing out poppies, but also worked with military children, helped with picnics and even been named official historian for the Junior Auxiliary members.

Lexis explains, "I got into it with my grandma, and I just liked doing it. I like to give something back to them, 'cause I feel like they deserve something after all the work that they've done for us. … I really don't think I should deserve anything back, because they're the ones who did something for my freedom."

Another tradition that has carried through the American Legion's history is honoring Gold Star Mothers and Blue Star Mothers. There is no membership fee that

can ever equal the price a mother pays to become a Gold Star Mother; the loss of her son or daughter's life in war. Blue Star Mothers are those who fret daily because their children are still overseas and in harm's way while fighting for our country.

The National Gold Star Mothers organization was founded in 1928 to provide support for those who have lost a son or brother to war. The Gold Star Mothers and Sisters of Post 41, with help from the Women's Auxiliary, has helped with the sorrow of fallen soldiers for over five decades.

Mary Moraga told a local Phoenix newspaper of how, after her mother died, she continued to honor her brother Benny Duarte who had died in the Korean War. Mary's mother had served for 31 years as a Post 41 Gold Star Mother. Then, at the end of her life, she asked Mary to continue in her stead. With the Gold Star group, Mary would go every Memorial Day for Mass at nearby St. Anthony's Church, then breakfast and the cemetery ceremony that American Legion Post 41 prepares for them.

Women's Auxiliary member Mary Córdova explains, "It's our way of honoring them and at the same time remembering them. It's also a time to thank the Lord for who we do have. It's in our *corazón*, especially after 9/11."

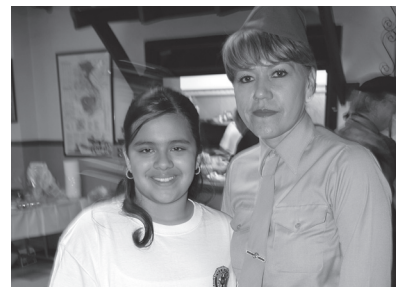


Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

Lexis Escudero, Poppy queen in 2007, 2008 and 2009 with former Auxiliary President Patsy Lugo

Convention time in the 1990s

The 1980s were a difficult time for the Mexican and Mexican American communities in South Phoenix. In 1981, one of the community's most respected women activists, Plácida García Smith, passed away. By 1986, the entire Golden Gate Barrio had been bulldozed—except for its Sacred Heart Church. Other neighboring communities were falling as well.

And though the decade is considered a time of prosperity in American history, minorities did not have a proportionate share of that wealth. Hispanics still had less education opportunities and lower-paying jobs. The women's struggle for equality had made progress but no complete victory, especially for minorities.

Despite progress in equal rights for women, old views were dying a slow death. In Bradford Luckingham's book, *Minorities in Phoenix*, a member of MUJER, a professional women's organization in Phoenix, Carmen Arroyo–Duran says in 1983, "Even today when so many of us are working outside the home, many of us feel a great deal of pressure. They say, 'Hey why don't you stay home and take care of your family and your husband?' ... But with that comes a lot of social values, a lot of personal traditions that now have to be restructured and some discarded because they've become obsolete... It used to be that it was an embarrassment among

Hispanic males if the wife had to work."[34]

Some women were still pressured to be the family caretakers before all else, while their husbands went off to work. And few role models had surfaced in the community for them to look up to; women like Margarita Alcantar Reese who was elected the first Mexican American Mayor of El Mirage in 1974 or Mary Rose Wilcox who was the first Mexican-American woman elected to the Phoenix City Council in 1983.

Though married to a World War II veteran, and a longtime member of Post 41, Dolores "Loli" Peña, didn't become involved in their activities until 1990, when she decided to go to a meeting and realized they needed help. She was working through a difficult stretch in her life, as she and her sister took care of their parents who were in ill health.

After they had passed, she needed something to distract her thoughts. "In the beginning I used to go out on the patio, and we would sell hot tamales. ... I became interested in helping them, as much as I could. That's when I started to become more active."

Then, in 1990, at a Legion convention in a downtown Phoenix hotel, something went wrong. The Post 41 Auxiliary commander, Lydia Aros suddenly collapsed to the floor. "I was vice president and Lydia Aros... she had a heart attack... and she just passed out. So I had to take over... that's why I became president the first time. But then I was reelected ... '91, and '92."

Peña rattles off numerous projects and holiday events the Auxiliary has held for the children of the community, as well as efforts to feed the homeless and help veterans. It becomes apparent, that through the decades, one thing had not changed. The Women's Auxiliary of Post 41 was still quietly making life a little better for the struggling barrios around them.

But conventions and the fall conference were still the events that Post members looked forward to. Peña continues with a new list, this time of destinations, "Going to the convention and the fall conference. We went to Douglas and we went to Prescott—to Tucson of course." Then she slips in an example of the sort of entertainment the Legionnaires and Auxiliary members had, "At the fall conference we used to have a contest for the legionnaires in membership. And if we beat them, they had to go down Whiskey Row in Prescott in their underwear... in their long johns! [The contest was for] the membership dues... We had pretty close to 300 members. The men lost... They had to go up and down Whiskey Row in their long johns and we took pictures of them. That was fun."

Auxiliary member Lorraine Vásquez laughs mischievously at the memory of that same contest, "...that was really something. They had to walk around that courtyard... It was a lot of fun." Then she changes topics.

A crowning achievement for Post 41 was in 1991 when the American Legion's National Convention was held in Phoenix. It was also the year that Desert Storm Veterans were welcomed officially into the Legion's membership rolls.

With a love of historical factoids and new cultures, Loli was fascinated by the various groups arriving in town from across the globe, "Our Post 41 was the one elected for them to gather... so we had people from the Philippines, from Puerto Rico—all over. The people from Puerto Rico brought

their specialty in food. We had Mexican food, American food, of course. The people from the Philippines… I didn't even know at that time that they had an American Legion Post… but of course, why not?!"

"To get acquainted with all these people from outside the state of Arizona is very, very good for all of us… we get to learn about them, what they are doing in their Post…"

For lighter moments, Bob Hope was on hand to entertain convention-goers that Sunday, and a huge tamale dinner was held with the help of Martha Murillo.

Martha Murillo is another woman that sits high on Auxiliary members' pedestals. Throughout the 1990s she was an inspiring force for many members. She's pulled many of the best women into the Auxiliary. Lupe Valenzuela, another former president recalls that Martha was not a woman that took 'no' for an answer. "She was the one that got me going. She called me one day and says, 'you don't know me but my name is Martha Murillo, and I know your husband for a long time, so I want you to come to the meeting. We're having one on Thursday.' I said 'wellllll, I'll see." "No, you don't see. You come.' …and I went."

Martha, and her husband Espiridion "Piro" M. Murillo were well loved and known in the community. As owners of Mi Ranchito restaurant and a tortilla chip company, they had made their own success, showing the tendency toward self employment and self sufficiency that many in the Mexican American community had used to improve their lives.

But when it came to bringing in members, Martha did her job well. Certainly it had worked with Lupe, who found herself pulled into the organization "It was friendly. And probably that was the reason I started meeting friends and just stayed on. From there on, I started volunteering every chance I got or needed me or was asked to volunteer."

And the volunteerism would continue. The Post 41 Women's Auxiliary would take on a new life as the economy and a new war make their community efforts as important as ever.

The Auxiliary Today

In 2009, THE AMERICAN Legion Post 41 seems to be bustling with activity, and the Auxiliary is no exception. It is as if the new century and a financial crisis in the United States rejuvenated them. In August of 2008, the National Convention was held in Phoenix again, to further inspire the Post to do more.

They have revived yard sales and a menudo breakfast event on Sunday mornings to raise money. Current Auxiliary president, Josie Herrera is particularly proud of the women's choir they started in 2008.

"We formed a choir last year… A retired teacher, Tommie Taylor. She's our choirmaster—teaches us how to sing. We have 10–12 [choir members]. It just depends on who comes that day. We sing at different functions. We sing at El Portal, and they pay us money. And when they pay us, we use it for our programs… the different programs that we support."

Herrera rattles off the choir's members with enthusiasm, "Patricia Lugo, Mary Córdova, Lupe Valenzuela, Lorraine Vásquez, Jenny Lechuga, Mary

Torres—also a past president—we got three juniors. Asiria Lugo, Analisia Juarez and Angelita… Angelita? Oh yeah! Benita Chacon! She's one of the choir."

But the choir is only one of many events. Often speakers are brought to Auxiliary meetings to inform and inspire members. It was at one recent event such as these that the Post succeeded in making members of Rita Brock-Perini, the daughter of Eleanor Abeytia. Rita had come to speak to the Auxiliary members about the City of Phoenix Military Veterans' Commission. She walked away a member, and not just of the Auxiliary. Rita Brock-Perini is a veteran, and also joined as a member of Post 41.

Rita is not only involved with Post 41, but works with LULAC Council 1087. She has whispered new ideas in the ears of Post 41 Auxiliary members. Some are new approaches to survival that have helped give the Auxiliary something to look forward to with new ideas to achieve their goals. Rita shares some of her efforts, "The other concept I'm trying to introduce to both the Legion and the Auxiliary is the concept of partnering. Because in this day and age there isn't any nonprofit that can pretty much float on their own right now. If you don't have somebody to partner with you, it's extremely difficult to get anything done… CPLC is the one we started out with. And now we're partnering with the census 2010."

The reason Rita suggested this as a good project to take on, says something of the Post's long-standing place of respect in the community where it is located. "It's in a high poverty area. And the census… every time they do the census, they count residents and the money gets allocated to Arizona, depending on who got counted. Well, that area requires a lot of services that Arizona has to provide, whether they get money or not."

"So I said to them, this is where you really could make a difference. The Post can spearhead a drive where we give information to the community and we support the census project and we educate people as to why we're doing this."

The Auxiliary contracted with the Census, and received materials to help them in a task they are best suited to perform; instilling trust and informing the people. The effort seems reminiscent of the task undertaken by Auxiliary women in the late 1940s when they were inspiring their community to vote in bond elections.

And Rita agrees, "as long as I can remember, the community has always looked to the Post for help with anything."

In order to deliver on that expectation, Post 41 and its Women's Auxiliary have found it necessary to reach out to other organizations in order to be more effective. In 2008, the U.S. economy began struggling to stay afloat in the midst of its worst collapse since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Nonprofit organizations were among the worst hit, because much of their money is dependent on community involvement—and the community had become too busy trying to protect its own resources.

The efforts of newer members may not always sit well with the older members of the Auxiliary. With a moment of mothering sternness, 91-year-old Louise Vildosola leans forward in the chair, her thin arms supporting her weight as she comments on the current Auxiliary members, "Well, they are (doing things)… you can't tell 'em anything. It's…" A laugh slips out before she continues,

"It's funny... Duvy Jacques, she was very active. And she knew a lot more than what I did. She used to correct them, and they didn't like it. Then there was a... she was our district president, Yañez. One of the Yañez girls and she used to get to them, and they didn't like it."

"So you don't tell 'em anything. They have the book. They can open the book if they want."

Then Vildosola concedes, "But they're doing alright." It's as if she has admitted to herself that it's a new time for the women. That everything will be just fine, even though the reins have been handed off to a new generation.

These "new" members have found ways to give back to the community. One example is Mary Angulo Córdova. She speaks with a soft care for the world around her, and refuses to speak ill of anyone. She dove headlong into helping those around her, after she was caught in the emotions of the sudden death of her husband David L. Córdova, in 1992.

Dolores "Loli" Peña gave Córdova her prayer book when she passed on Chaplain duties to her. And Peña can't help but speak highly of Córdova, "she has been doing a wonderful job since '97, and even before that. And she goes out to the homeless people, bringing blankets and food and whatever else she can take them."

Today, as chaplain, Córdova is called up for the duty of speaking at funerals. In 2009, there have been nine Auxiliary members who passed on. But she also gives a remembrance and service to those veterans lost in the cracks of society. She treasures the memory of a phone call she received during the summer of 2009, from the director of

Photo: Latino Perspectives Magazine

Chaplain Mary Córdova at left, celebrates Veterans' Day 2009 with Post 41 Auxiliary President Josephine Herrera

a homeless shelter, and how she made the members there so happy.

"One of the homeless guys had passed away. And he had no family, and they wanted some kind of closure for him, all the residents, and they asked me if I would go and do the service. They called me at noon, and so I did, I was there at 5. ... I've done a lot of services... but that one..." Córdova gazes off in reverence as she continues, "...it was outside. And they had a big pole with a flag. And I think they had 15 to 18 of the residents. It was out in the open. The homeless guy's name was Freddie. And they told me his story. We had a prayer. We had a fellowship. They came and told his story. When it ended, I knew that Freddie had been given the dignity that he so deserved as a veteran. He didn't leave all forgotten."

But Córdova just can't stop at that effort to give back. After the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001, she immediately volunteered with the Red Cross, answering calls from worried citizens. In

2005 she returned to help the Red Cross provide for those displaced by Hurricane Katrina and its destruction of the coastline in the Southeastern U.S. She also gives back to those who are between lives and destinations, as soldiers entering or returning from duty.

Córdova is a volunteer at the Military and Veterans Hospitality Room at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, opened in 2006 and created in part by the Phoenix Military & Veterans Commission that Rita Brock-Perini is a member of.

"That was something that caught my eye right away, because I knew it would be serving veterans. So I volunteered… So when they come in, of course they sign in, and then I show them… I give them a tour; where the coffee is and refreshments are. And you can use the computers."

"I point out everything we have there available for them… sometimes… some of them… the ones who touch my heart, are the ones who are just enlisted and they're going to boot camp; the young kids. I can tell right away when they walk in, you know? They look so young. They have this kind of scared look—like they don't know what's out there."

Córdova does her best to set these new recruits at ease, for a brief moment on their way into the unknown world of the military. She asks them to come back and tell her how they're doing. They often do. When they do, she does her best to avert a repeated heartbreak of unwelcomed soldiers who returned from Vietnam.

"Also when some come back… some of them want to talk, some don't. And you can tell right away… we wait for them… Those who wanna be talking, they'll start going right away. So I'm a good listener you know? …I reinforce how… we are proud of their service to our country. This is going back to Vietnam. I don't want any veteran to ever feel that way."

"And sometimes it's just funny conversations. Sometimes they go on with their family so I just wish 'em well. Most of them always say, 'well, we'll come back here, when we leave.' And I say, 'please do that.' There's been times when they are at the door, and I just give 'em a hug and I just say a quick prayer when I know they're leaving. And I can see that they… appreciate it."[35]

Mary Córdova has also donated something precious to the Hospitality Room.

While visiting the hospitality room, Marine Captain Kevin M. Brown had spotted an empty flag case and offered to fly a flag on a mission and return it for display. With much of Mary Córdova passion for community service coming as a way to overcome her husband's unexpected passing in 1992, it seems fitting that she donated the memorial flag for her late husband, veteran David L. Córdova.

"We sent David Córdova's memorial flag to Captain Brown, who along with his copilot Marine Captain Aaron E. Milroy, flew the flag aboard a U.S. Marine Corps AH-1W 'Super Cobra' helicopter during a close air support combat mission over Iraq on April 19, 2007, during Operation Iraqi Freedom," says executive director Anne Theodosis."[36]

Perhaps the humble passion of the American Legion Post 41 Women's Auxiliary can be seen in Mary Córdova's reply when asked

why she doesn't have any desire to become president of the Auxiliary, "I have been urged to run for the president. Specially by the commanders who know me. In my heart I feel like I have been touched, the way that I am serving. Someone else would have to answer that or tell you [why], but I'm very proud of what I've done as Chaplain. And my goal has always been to bring people together. And also be in the Legion family—show the side of us that we all need to unite. You know how it can be when you have a group. I'm more or less the cheerleader... I just feel ... that's what I was meant to be. Being the president is wonderful, and I admire them all so much..." She then explains that all her efforts keep her busy enough.

But where does all of this passion come from for these women? Perhaps it can be described in Lorraine Vásquez's telling of a childhood memory and the discovery she made several decades later, "We had this teacher. She must've had a relative, father, brother, whatever. And she had a world map... on the wall. And she would tell us where the seventh fleet was. Every week. It was very patriotic times."

For a bit, Vásquez trails off into the details of her childhood patriotism. After a long discussion of all the ration books, and collecting rubber, about being a brownie and other contributions to the war effort she returns to her point.

"So then, I go back to this classroom [where] we followed the 7th Fleet." She gestures to her husband, Rudy Vásquez, and continues. "Maybe about five, six years ago, we were sitting at the table and I asked. See, he never talked about his experiences. So I did ask him. I said, 'Can't you tell me, just what you did? What did you do in the Navy?'"

Rudy replied to his wife's request, "Well, I was in the 7th Fleet."

Trying to keep tears back, her voice cracks in the animated retelling, "So I got up. I ran around and hugged him! 'I followed you! I followed you!!'"

She wipes her moist eyes with a sheepish smile, a little embarrassed at her emotion, and continues, "So, anyway... that's why... I'm devoted to the program. And the veterans."

Devotion. This is what courses through the hearts of these women. When they and their husbands could not celebrate their patriotism at the existing American Legion Post 1, they formed their own Post where Mexican American veterans were welcomed.

These were women who knocked on every door they could to motivate an entire community in bond elections. They prepared meal after meal; dance after dance—all to pull families together or raise funds to help those in need. Some have healed babies and educated the mothers who could not have done it alone. These women have spent countless hours in hospitals with veterans that many had forgotten through the decades, and said eulogies for homeless veterans and comforted the women who paid an ultimate price by losing their child in the crossfire of our wars.

At Tony F. Soza/Ray Martinez Post 41, these women have kept traditions alive, yet fomented the change needed to better lives, through community service and activism. They continue to do so, for a new generation of hope.

SOURCES

1. January 30, 1948 Auxiliary Meeting minutes document, provided by American Legion Auxiliary Post 41

2. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: pages 71–73, 84, 85

3. *El Paso Herald Post*, April 27, 1957: page 3

4. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds:

5. *Latinas in the United States: a historical encyclopedia, Volume 1*, By Vicki Ruíz, Virginia Sánchez Korrol: page 271

6. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: (91) page 154

7. *A Legal History of Maricopa County*, By Stan Watts, page 37; Jean Reynolds, *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998); Tony Valenzuela, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson; Harriet Chavez, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

8. DVD presentation: *Los Veteranos of World War II. A Mission for Social Change in Central Arizona*, by Pete R. Dimas Published in 2007, Braun Sacred Heart Center, Inc.

9. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: page 78–79

10. Minnie Rangel Martínez, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

11. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: Page 174

12. *En Aquel Entonces,* Christine Marín, 304, Avila: Titcomb, 59: *El Mensajero*, October 9, 1942, Sherman, 3); *Progress and a Mexican American community's struggle for existence: Phoenix's Golden Gate Barrio*, by Dr. Pete R. Dimas, page 110

13. Christine Marín, *En Aquel Entonces*, page 181

14. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: page 56

15. Lorraine Vasquez, September 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

16. Arizona's Hispanic Military Contribution, by Christine Marín, February 1991, Pages 9-10

17. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: pages 151-152)

18. Minnie Rangel Martínez, October 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

19. Tony Valenzuela, August 2008 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

20. *Arizona Republic* December 6, 1949

21. *The First Hundred Years: a History of Arizona Blacks* by Richard E. Harris, page 139

22. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds

23. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) By Jean Reynolds: page 156

24. Ibid: Pages 154-155

25. Mary Córdova, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Minnie Rangel Martínez, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

29. *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998) by Jean reynolds: from 80 Ibid, 154-156;

30. Rita Brock-Perini, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

31. *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in search of Camelot* By Ignacio M. García, page 66

32. Frances Tovar, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

33. *Arizona's Hispanic Military Contribution*, by Christine Marín, February 1991, page 4

34. *Minorities in Phoenix: a Profile of Mexican American, Chinese American , and African American communities, 1860-1992* By Bradford Luckingham, page 71

35. Mary Córdova, 2009 tape-recorded interview by Charles H. Sanderson

36. *Latino Perspectives Magazine*, July 2008

INDEX

A message from our project partners

Latino Perspectives magazine

Latino Perspectives Magazine presents this humble tribute to the current and past membership of American Legion "Tony F. Soza-Ray Martinez" Post 41; to the families and brave men and women who have, without fanfare, played a pivotal role in fostering patriotism, civic engagement, and the preservation of cultural traditions in our community. *Latino Perspectives* is honored to preserve their contributions and further its editorial mission to document the pursuit of the American Dream. We salute "The Jewel of El Barrio," and our project partners, RCI and SRP.

Raúl H. Castro Institute is a collaborative effort of

Maricopa Community Colleges · Phoenix College · ASU Center for Community Development and Civil Rights · Arizona State University

The vision of the Raul H. Castro Institute (RCI) is to improve the quality of life for the Latino community in Arizona by focusing on the priority areas of education, health & human services, and civic engagement & leadership. The Women of the American Legion "Tony F. Soza-Ray Martinez" Post 41 embrace the spirit of leadership and, for decades, have championed civic engagement. Their work in providing health services to the community is a true example of stewardship. We hope that the use of this book in educational institutions will touch lives for decades to come, and continue to inspire generations of leaders. RCI is proud to be a part of this project.

SRP®

For more than 100 years, SRP has worked to deliver more than power by providing outreach and support to the communities we serve. The contributions of Arizona's Latino community are entwined with both the history of our state and the history of SRP. But we recognize that the Latino community has even more to offer and will shape Arizona's future in profound ways. SRP is proud to partner with the Raul H. Castro Institute and Latino Perspectives Magazine to preserve the stories of Those Who Serve, help define the rich history of our state and inspire a new generation to play its part in shaping a future of boundless potential. On behalf of the SRP employee family, we hope you enjoy this book.